dissent

$6.00/Fall 1992

THE AMERICAN CONDITION

ROBERT HEILBRONER
An Economy in Deep Trouble

HAROLD MEYERSON
The Elections: America's Choice

NICOLAUS MILLS
Conflict at Caterpillar

IRIS MARION YOUNG /DAVID GARROW
The Supreme Court & Abortion

HERBERT GANS
The War Against the Poor

MICHAEL B. KATZ
The Poverty Debate

MURRAY HAUSKNECHT
Politics & Trust

AFTER THE COLD WAR

ROY MEDVEDEV
New Tendencies in Russian Politics

JAMES B. RULE / MICHAEL WALZER
Nationalism, Tribalism

ALAN RYAN
Is Egalitarianism Dead?

FRANK ROOSEVELT
Marx & Markets

JOANNE BARKAN
Troubles on the Italian Left

JONATHAN FRANKEL
The Rabin Era?

ERAZIM KOHÁK
Czechoslovakia: Tattered Velvet

MITCHELL COHEN
Rooted Cosmopolitanism

NICHOLAS WERTH
Workers' Action in the Years of Perestroika

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Against the Tide...

JEWISH POLEMICS

Arthur Hertzberg

Passionate, controversial, and frank, this Rabbi, academic, and member of the international political community draws upon his own experiences to speak out on topics ranging from creating a Palestinian state to Pope John Paul II. This is the frankest and most challenging expression of the liberal Jewish mind likely to appear in print.

272 pp., $27.95

ZION AND STATE

NATION, CLASS, AND THE SHAPING OF MODERN ISRAEL

Mitchell Cohen

This comprehensive and detailed account explores the tensions between left and right-wing factions within the Zionist movement as it examines the coming-of-age of modern Jewish nationalism. An additional article and preface by the author bring the information up to date as of 1991.

336 pp., $40.00 CLOTH, $12.50 PAPER
BACK IN PRINT!

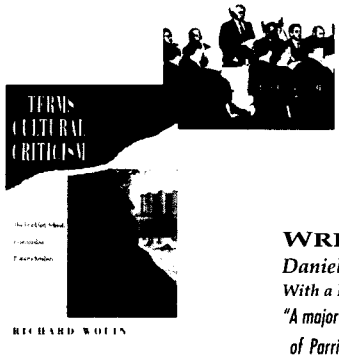
THE TERMS OF CULTURAL CRITICISM

THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL, EXISTENTIALISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Richard Wolin

Diving into the rifts among three currents of thought, Wolin sees the blurring of "science" and "reason" as one of the most fatal intellectual mistakes of our age.

300 pp., $35.00



WRITERS ON THE LEFT

Daniel Aaron

With a New Preface by Alan Wald

"A major literary history destined to stand beside the histories of Parrington, Brooks, and Spiller...a work of this caliber deserves examination and re-examination."
—Library Journal

August, 496 pp., $40.00 CLOTH, $14.95 PAPER, BACK IN PRINT!

MERCEDES IN PEACE AND WAR

GERMAN AUTOMOBILE WORKERS, 1903-1945

Bernard P. Bellon

"A chilling account of how the great automobile and arms maker prospered of the backs of its workers, including the use of thousands of concentration camp slave laborers right up to the final days of the Third Reich."
—The New York Times

420 pp., 40 PHOTOS & ILLUS., $16.50
NOW A PAPERBACK!

POLITICS AND THE NOVEL

Irving Howe

What is the role of revolutionary ideas in fiction? Eminent and controversial scholar Irving Howe traces the growth of the political novel into the 20th century, examining how American novels failed to integrate ideology into their works.

"An intelligent, penetrating, lucid, graceful, persuasive and altogether splendid book."
—The New Republic

August, 272 pp., $30.00 CLOTH, $12.50 PAPER
BACK IN PRINT!

THE RADICAL NOVEL IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900-1954

SOME INTERRELATIONS OF LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Walter B. Rideout

In vogue in the 1930's, the proletarian novel was later dismissed by critics as interest in Marxism waned. Rideout explores the relationship between society and literature, drawing from socialist works such as Freedman's BY BREAD ALONE, Wright's NATIVE SON, and Heaton's STRIKE!.

August, 360 pp., $29.00 CLOTH, $13.95 PAPER, BACK IN PRINT!

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

TO ORDER, CALL OR WRITE. CHARGE CARDS ACCEPTED
DEPT. T70 • 136 SOUTH BROADWAY, IRVINGTON, NY 10533 • TEL: (800) 944-UNIV • FAX: (800) 944-1844

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Word to Our Readers . . .

It's become an old American tradition, like Mother's Day and the Fourth of July. Every two years we send out an SOS to our friends and say, "Do you want *Dissent* to keep going? Then please help us with a contribution!"

We ask only once every two years—in all our 39 years we have *never* asked more often or made "emergency appeals." But ask we must. Minority magazines, with very little advertising, can never be self-supporting. All of us at *Dissent* contribute our labor, our time, our talents, our money. But deficits are unavoidable, and they must be made up.

So please, lend a hand.

Our goal for 1993 is:

$90,000

We ask you to help—if you possibly can, with contributions in three figures. You can pay out your pledge in installments over the next two years, or you can make life a little easier for us by sending in your check now.

Essential information: *Dissent* is published by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017. All contributions should be made out to the foundation (you can abbreviate: FSISI) *and are tax deductible*.

Pledges are fine, pledges are lovely, but checks—ah!

The Editors

I enclose a check for $_____. In addition I pledge $_____ payable on the following date: _____.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

All contributions are tax deductible. Please make checks payable to FSISI, 521 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017

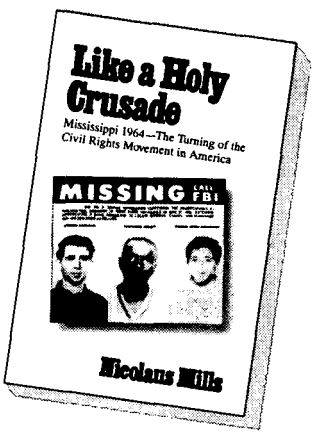
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A clear and marvelously evocative account."
—David Garrow

"Strong and vivid....In these pages history comes alive." —Irving Howe

Nicolaus Mills

Like a Holy Crusade



Mississippi 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America

Just published to exceptional reviews

Almost thirty years ago the Mississippi Summer Project brought whites and blacks together to help "break" Mississippi and secure voting rights for its citizens. Nicolaus Mills recounts this dramatic episode that took a terrible toll on staff, volunteers, and the black families who opened their homes to the movement. Tracing the events from origins to aftermath, Mills recalls its triumphs but also shows how the quest for racial solidarity turned bitter and divisive. "One of modern America's most courageous and inspiring undertakings," says David Garrow, "and with undeniable lessons for the 1990s."

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher
1332 North Halsted Street, Chicago 60622
At your bookseller, or order toll free 1-800-634-0226.
Major credit cards accepted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dissent

Fall 1992

COMMENTS AND OPINIONS

Harold Meyerson on Bill Clinton and the election, **421** • comments on the *Casey* decision by *Iris Marion Young*, **425**, and *David Garrow*, **427** • *Richard Rothstein* on looting in L.A. and elsewhere, **429** • *Richard Schrader* on the fiasco at Rio, **431** • *Joanne Barkan* on political crisis in Italy, **433**

REPORTS FROM ABROAD

Jonathan Frankel on the Israeli elections, **437** • *Erazim Kohák* on Czechoslovakia, **441**

ARTICLES

An Economy in Deep Trouble
Robert Heilbroner
445

The Conflict at Caterpillar
Nicolaus Mills
451

On Politics and Trust
Murray Hausknecht
456

The War Against the Poor
Herbert J. Gans
461

Scenarios For Possible Lefts
Michael Walzer
466

Is Egalitarianism Dead?
Alan Ryan
470

Rooted Cosmopolitanism
Mitchell Cohen
478

Latin America: Still in Trouble
Ian Roxborough
484

After the Communist Collapse
Roy Medvedev
489

In the Years of Perestroika
Nicholas Werth
498

Marx and Market Socialism
Frank Roosevelt
511

COMMUNICATIONS

James Rule and *Michael Walzer* on tribalism and the left, **519**

CULTURE NOTES

Jeremy Larner on sneakers and the fabric of democracy, **525** • *Leonard Quart* on African Americans and Jews in Hollywood, **528**

BOOKS

George Scialabba on Michael Holroyd's *Bernard Shaw: A Biography*, **532** • *Alan Wolfe* on two books by Perry Anderson: *English Questions* and *A Zone of Engagement*, **536** • *Ruth Rosen* on Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller's *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States 1776–1990*, **539** • *Oliver Conant* on Michael Sheldon's *Orwell: The Authorized Biography*, **541** • *Jean Bethke Elshtain* on Orlando Patterson's *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, **544** • *Fred Block* on Peter Baldwin's *The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875–1975* and Fritz Scharpf's *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy*, **546** • *Michael Katz* on Lawrence Mead's *The New Politics of Poverty: The Non-Working Poor in America*, **548** • *Lewis Coser* on Helmut Gruber's *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working Class Culture*, **553**

IN MEMORIAM

Lewis Coser remembers Joseph Buttinger
556

LETTERS

557

Editors
Mitchell Cohen
Irving Howe
Michael Walzer

Executive Editor
Emanuel Geltman

Managing Editor
Maxine Phillips

Book Review Editors
Mark Levinson
Brian Morton

Business Manager
Simone Plastrik

Editorial Assistants
David Glenn
J. Monaco

Editorial Board
Bernard Avishai
Joanne Barkan
David Bensman
Marshall Berman
Paul Berman
H. Brand
David Bromwich
Luther P. Carpenter
Jean L. Cohen
Lewis Coser
Rose Laub Coser
Bogdan Denitch
Jeff Faux
Cynthia Fuchs Epstein
Ferenc Fehér
Todd Gitlin
Murray Hausknecht
Robert Heilbroner
Agnes Heller
Martin Kilson
Erazim Kohák
William Kornblum
Jeremy Larner
Deborah Meier
Harold Meyerson
Nicolaus Mills
Jo-Ann Mort
Carol O'Cleireacain
Martin Peretz
Ronald Radosh
Bernard Rosenberg
James Rule
Alan Ryan
Meyer Schapiro
Patricia Cayo Sexton
Fred Siegel
Jim Sleeper
Cornel West
Sean Wilentz
Dennis Wrong

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AMONG OUR CONTRIBUTORS

JOANNE BARKAN is a free-lance writer and author of *Visions of Emancipation: The Italian Workers' Movement Since 1945.*

FRED BLOCK is an economic sociologist at the University of California, Davis.

OLIVER CONANT is a New York-based critic.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN is a professor of philosophy at Vanderbilt University. She is the author most recently of *Power Trips and Other Journeys* and a contributor to *But Was It Just?*

JONATHAN FRANKEL is professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is co-editor of *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* and *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe.*

HERBERT J. GANS writes regularly about poverty. His latest book is *People and Plans: Essays on Poverty, Racism and Other National Urban Problems* (Columbia University Press, 1991).

DAVID J. GARROW received a 1987 Pulitzer Prize for *Bearing The Cross.* His next book, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe v. Wade, 1923–1973*, will be published in the fall of 1993.

MURRAY HAUSKNECHT is a sociologist living in New York City.

ROBERT HEILBRONER is the author of *Behind The Veil of Economics* and many other books.

MICHAEL KATZ'S most recent books are *The Undeserving Poor: From the War On Poverty to the War On Welfare* (Pantheon) and an edited collection, *The "Underclass" Debate: Views From History* (forthcoming from Princeton).

ERAZIM KOHÁK is professor of philosophy at Boston University and at Charles University in Prague.

JEREMY LARNER is a screenwriter who will soon be leaving California.

ROY MEDVEDEV is the author of *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* and many other books.

HAROLD MEYERSON is executive editor of the *L.A. Weekly.*

NICOLAUS MILLS'S *Like A Holy Crusade: Mississippi 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America* has just been published.

LEONARD QUART is associate professor of cinema studies at the College of Staten Island and the CUNY Graduate Center, an editor of *Cinéaste*, and author of *American Film and Society Since 1945* (Praeger).

FRANK ROOSEVELT teaches economics at Sarah Lawrence College. His essay in this issue reflects his ongoing work in cooperation with the other members of the economics branch of the New York City chapter of Democratic Socialists of America.

RUTH ROSEN is professor of history at the University of California at Davis and is a regular columnist on the op-ed page of the *Los Angeles Times.* She is the editor of *The Maimie Papers*, author of *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America*, and is currently writing a cultural history of contemporary feminism.

RICHARD ROTHSTEIN is a research associate of the Economic Policy Institute and analyst for members of the Los Angeles School Board. He writes a bi-weekly column for the *L.A. Weekly, L.A. Opinion*, and the *Sacramento Bee.*

IAN ROXBOROUGH is professor of sociology and history at the State University of New York–Stony Brook.

JAMES B. RULE is at the Institute for Advanced Study.

ALAN RYAN is a Mellon Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, where he is writing on John Dewey and American liberalism.

RICHARD SCHRADER is the deputy commissioner for the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs and writes regularly on politics and the environment for *Newsday.*

GEORGE SCIALABBA, a free-lance writer, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

NICHOLAS WERTH is researcher in Soviet history at the Centre National de la Récherche Scientifique in Paris.

ALAN WOLFE is the dean of the graduate faculty at the New School for Social Research.

IRIS MARION YOUNG teaches ethics in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh and is the author of *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton).

DISSENT (ISSN 0012–3846), issued October 1, 1992, is published quarterly, winter, spring, summer, and fall, by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. Subscriptions: $22.00 for one year; $40.00 for two years; $15.00 for students for one year; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $7.00 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate $30.00 per year, $50.00 for two years; single copy $6.00. All payments from foreign countries must be made by United States money orders or checks payable in United States currency. For special rates on bulk orders from organizations, teachers, etc., write directly to DISSENT. For information on newsstand and bookstore distribution write to: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 1992 by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc. (FSISI). Permission to reprint any article must be obtained from the publishers. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope.
• Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. • Volume 39, Number 4 (whole No. 169).

• *Dissent* does not engage in lobbying or support candidates or legislation. Front cover design by Robert Schwartz.
DISSENT is indexed in the *PAIS Bulletin, Academic Abstracts, Magazine Article Summaries,* and *Social Science Source.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harold Meyerson

THE ELECTION: IMPENDING REALIGNMENT?

Bill Clinton had planned some remarks for the evening of Neil Kinnock's anticipated victory in the British elections this spring—doubtless something about the global rejection of Thatcherism and Reaganism. He never delivered that speech, of course, but his private, unplanned remarks, as reported by Martin Walker, Washington bureau chief for the *Guardian*, were revealing enough. According to Walker, what Clinton said was, "I guess the Brighton program [Kinnock's attempt to recenter Labour] didn't go as far as Bad Godesberg [the German Social Democrats' very successful 1959 effort to redefine themselves]."

I cite the comment not only because a social democratic quarterly should take some notice when a presidential front-runner actually knows something about European social democracy, but also because Clinton is a bit of a Bad Godesberg Democrat himself. Like the Germans of 1959, he has repositioned his party, though not in the manner commonly surmised. The late Joseph Rauh, longtime doyen of the ADA (Americans for Democratic Action), was voicing the prevailing liberal view when he told the *New York Times* of his disappointment that "the spectrum of my party has moved so far to the right." But the Clintonization of the Democrats is anything but a simple rightward lurch. For the Democrats' rightward drift dates not from this summer but from the mid-seventies. To be sure, Bill Clinton is not a Ted Kennedy liberal or Jesse Jackson lefty—but Kennedy and Jackson never won the party's nomination. The candidates who did—Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis—articulated a kind of collective retreat from New Deal and Great Society liberalism. True, all three were liberal on noneconomic issues. But Carter was locked by inflation into policies of fiscal conservatism, Dukakis eschewed post-Reagan populism for the elusive appeal of Brookline technocracy, and although Mondale, by virtue of his closeness to unions, civil rights groups and other Democratic organizations, may have seemed the last living New Dealer, his battle cry—deficit reduction through higher taxes—was so conservative and glum that both Bob Dole and Paul Tsongas could happily have run on it.

The Stealth Social Democrat?

The Democrats were already a neo-liberal party long before Bill Clinton came along—and it's neo-liberal politics that Clinton has overturned. In part, that has meant repudiating some of the party's social liberalism, such as opposition to the death penalty. Even more, it's meant repudiating the party's image of social liberalism, which led to Clinton's convention-time bashing of Jesse Jackson and Jerry Brown. (Since Clinton is the first child of the sixties to be a presidential nominee, the actual substance of his cultural politics is a good deal more complex. It's at his direction, for instance, that the Democrats have quietly but unmistakably embraced gay and lesbian rights.) But Clinton's turn away from eighties Democratic positions has also meant moving leftward on economic policy, toward the kind of universal programs that the Democrats have not espoused in decades: vastly expanded college loans, apprenticeships for non-college-bound high school graduates, a major public works program and, however fuzzy its contours, national health insurance. Clinton's affinity for Bad Godesberg, then, isn't confined to moving the Democrats away from the marginal politics of cultural liberalism and narrowly targeted (i.e., race-based) economic remedies. More than virtually any leading figure in American politics—certainly more than any other electable presidential contender—Clinton looks to the socio-economic arrangements of continental capitalism for ways to fix the U.S. economy. The Clinton stump speech is a calculated affront to American insularity—a litany of the nations we've fallen behind in wages and living standards, with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side trips into comparative economic policy (lately, "We're the only nation that would throw defense workers onto the streets without any industrial policy to reemploy them"). For Clinton, the laissez-faire economics of Anglo-American capitalism has led chiefly to speculation and industrial flight. Consistently, he commends instead the policies of those nations whose economies he calls "better organized"—which means, characterized by industrial policy, an emphasis on work force skills, and a priority on manufacturing. In a word, Germany.

Which is to say, to identify Clinton simply by linking him to the Democratic Leadership Council—the corporate-funded collection of neos, con and lib, that he helped found—fails to adequately describe his politics. Yes, Clinton's embraced the DLC's attack on welfare, some of its distance from unions, and the appearance of its social conservatism. But anyone attempting to define Clinton more fully would do well to look at *Why Americans Hate Politics*, the 1991 book by *Washington Post* reporter E.J. Dionne, Jr., whose strategic conclusions both mirror and anticipate Clinton's own. (At various points along the campaign trail, Clinton has volunteered that he agreed with everything in Dionne's book.) Like Clinton (and like University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson, whose defense of universal over race-based remedial programs has also had a profound effect on Clinton's thinking), Dionne has wrongly been placed in the "neo" column for urging the Democrats to refrain from refighting the cultural civil wars of the sixties with the Republicans (a fight the Democrats can't win). Less noticed has been Dionne's critique of Carter (who failed in his estimation because he didn't deliver on national health insurance and other broad-based social programs) and his recommendation of such programs to today's party.

Clinton and Dionne are stealth social democrats, applauded or reviled for backing off certain cultural/political positions, while the larger achievement to which they have contributed—ratcheting American liberalism into a new-age version of Roosevelt-Truman economics—has gone substantially unnoticed. More problematically, both espouse a social democracy without social democrats. Neither pays much heed to the decline of unions. Clinton's call for a "better organized" economy omits any reference to increasing unionization; his stump speech mantra on building "high-wage, high-skill jobs" does not acknowledge the role that unions have played in creating them in the nations to which he alludes. Who, if not unions, does Clinton think will provide the core support for industrial policy, worker retraining, the creation of upscale durable-goods manufacturing?

The contrast in these matters between Clinton's position and those of Jesse Jackson and Jerry Brown could not be greater. In their speeches to the Democratic convention, both Jackson and Brown spoke of the symbiotic role that the movements of the thirties and sixties had had with the New Deal and the Great Society; both spoke for bolstering the movements of the nineties. Though himself an activist in the antiwar movement of Vietnam days, Clinton never speaks of bolstering movements. It may be that a career spent in Arkansas inters all such thoughts; that the repositioning of the Democratic party requires silencing them; that the current weakness of labor discourages them; or that Clinton's fatal attraction to pleasing everyone precludes them. Whatever the reason, the politics that emerge seems oddly incomplete: social democracy without a base.

And yet, Clinton's summertime rise in the polls coincided with his moving steadily if discreetly leftward on economics. His economic program, released in June, favored increasing public sector investment over retiring the deficit. (One of the most heartening things about Clinton's campaign is that the deficit-reduction crew at the Brookings Institute, which did so much to paralyze Jimmy Carter, is clearly not part of his circle.) His early reaction to the Free Trade Agreement with Mexico (I write before his complete response has been delivered) suggests he's siding with those of his advisers (in particular, Ira Magaziner and Derek Shearer) who argue against an unmitigated version of free trade, maintaining that America needs not only a better trained work force but a globalization of the mixed economy.

But all of Clinton's repositioning, this entire rhumba of left and right, would be of limited use to the Democrats were it not for the long-term stagnation of the economy. At the height of sixties prosperity, the Democrats conceived a policy of taxing broadly to spend narrowly, remedially, on the Other America. Problem was, the boom years shuddered to a halt in 1973, and it took the Democrats nearly two decades to realize that the nation had regressed sharply toward a pre-New Deal distribution of wealth that enabled them to return to policies they had espoused before the postwar boom: taxing narrowly (that is, the rich) to spend broadly. For the first time since 1948, America is having an election in which prosperity is not a given, and it is that fact, and Clinton's understanding of it, that creates the possibility of realignment this November.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Revolt of the De-Aligned

Ironically, the key to Clinton's success has been the rise, fall and mass migration of the Perot campaign into his column. Clinton, the most consummate of pols, the champion of organization, has been aided by a war against politics waged by the unorganized. The Perot campaign was strongest precisely in those sectors of American life least likely to have an organized political life. Perot support was highest in the Sunbelt, the suburbs, the West, and among independents. His campaign went boldly where no organization had gone before.

The late Lee Atwater once told political writer Thomas Edsall that the conservative ascendancy which began in 1968 had depended on the invention of a new elite. Traditional populism was arrayed against the rich, Atwater said, but the target of contemporary right-wing populist resentment was a new elite of intrusive government bureaucrats (George Wallace's pointy-heads) and the shiftless clientele it created and served (Ronald Reagan's welfare queens). But Perot's legions were arrayed against a third elite: the political class. In part, the Perot phenomenon followed reasonably enough from the under-organization of America and the corresponding professionalization of its politics. With mass mobilization largely a thing of the past, American politics has transformed itself into a system that works without popular participation. Advocacy between campaigns has been reduced to using funds raised through direct mail to pay the salaries of professional lobbyists. Here in California, elections have become so capital-intensive that some campaigns have trouble finding work for the stray volunteer who arrives on the doorstep. Like Sartre's hell, politics is other people.

The brilliance of the Perot campaign was that it needed people. After deciding at a late date to run outside the two-party system, Perot needed bodies beyond even his capacity to hire them. He needed volunteers. At its best, the Perot campaign exploited a justifiable rage at the professionalization of politics. Most of the time, though, it was fueled by a rage at politics itself. It was a rage that Perot himself stoked. His models of governance were resolutely anti-political. His administration would be staffed by "the best people"; he would seek "consensus" rather than a mere factional majority; he promised a direct line between the leader and the led that would bypass such traditional impediments as parties, interest groups, organizations. Warring on politics rather than the imbalance of power, Perot's people were heroic one moment, supine the next. Many of them rightly resisted the military martinets whom Perot sent out to coordinate their efforts. But there were virtually no objections when Perot went to the mountaintop alone to formulate his platform without input from his volunteers. Input would have required organization and—well, politics.

Odd that this anti-political jihad should have aided Clinton, but that's exactly what it ended up doing. At a time when Clinton had little credibility, Perot crystallized the nation's disgust with George Bush. At a time when Clinton was extremely vulnerable to attack, it was Perot who drew Bush's fire—dragging down both target and assailant. (One Clinton aide told *Los Angeles Times* reporter Ron Brownstein that the campaign feared "being strangled in its cradle" by Bush campaign attacks during the grim period following the New York primary. Only, the attacks were launched at Perot.) And by the time he folded his tent and noisily stole away, Perot had peeled millions of voters away from Bush. His campaign may well be seen in hindsight as a kind of halfway house for millions of Reagan Democrats, independents, even some Republicans, the midpoint of a journey into (for many, back into) Democratic ranks.

If the Democrats can deliver.

The End of the Conservative Era

I write in the summer of the Democrats' unaccustomed content—on the eve of the Republican convention, with Clinton's post-Democratic convention lead essentially undiminished, and with Congressional Democrats having opened a sizable lead over their Republican counterparts in the polls of the past two weeks. By now, it's clear that most of the conventional wisdom about 1992 no longer obtains: that the Gulf War made Bush unchallengeable, that the recovery was in the mail, that the Democrats would be incapable of getting their act together.

We may well be facing an election that will put an end to the conservative era that began in 1968. To be sure, Bush is likely to wage a campaign of sleaze and international adventurism that may take its toll on Clinton; and yes, reapportionment has given the Republicans a leg up in legislative races. But the factors that favor the Democrats are more profound. Foremost among them is the mass recognition of America's long-term economic decline. Other factors include:

- A maldistribution of wealth that has so diminished purchasing power and so increased debt for the majority of Americans that the recovery is forever delayed.
- The intellectual exhaustion not merely of the Bush administration but of conservatism generally. It's worth remembering that there never has been a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bush agenda—that just a few short weeks into office, Chief of Staff John Sununu was asking Republican legislators what they thought the administration's agenda should be. But the relative ascendancy of Jack Kemp within Republican ranks should not be mistaken for a sign of vitality. The Kemp response to the crisis of urban America, after all, amounts to misapplied Thatcherism—encouraging the very poor to take their housing projects private—or to the beggar-thy-neighbor game of enterprise zones, which Peter Dreier has characterized as robbing St. Petersburg to pay St. Paul. As I write, the party is about to go through yet one more round of the deficit-reducers against the tax-cutters. But neither camp's program will do anything to promote the necessary investments or sufficiently bolster purchasing power. By contrast, a Louis Harris poll in the August 24 issue of *Business Week* shows that by a 51 to 47 percent margin, 401 executives drawn from *Business Week*'s list of the 1,000 largest U.S. corporations believe that "After twelve years of laissez-faire economic policies, the government needs to take a more active role in stimulating jobs and investment." When the corporate elite is willing to relegate Republican economics to the realm of pure theology, the party has a relevance problem.

• The race card—after the Willie Horton saga and this year's L.A. riots—is much harder to play. All that remains of GOP divide-and-conquer politics is gay-baiting.

• The abortion issue, once a wedge to split the Democrats, now splits the Republicans deeper.

• The end of the cold war—and communism—has radically transformed American politics. It removes the one element that united all the little tents—moralists, libertarians, Brahmins, Yahoos—under one big tent.

Yugoslavia and Somalia

The limitations of quarterly publication and a long "lead time" make it impossible for us to say anything about the tragic events in Yugoslavia and Somalia that will not be dated by the time this issue appears. But we have a promise from co-editor Bogdan Denitch, who spent the summer in Yugoslavia, that he will write a full report on the struggle in Bosnia for our Winter 1993 issue, and we hope to have a similar report on Somalia. Stay tuned!—Eds.

It has also killed Republican Keynesianism. No longer can the Republicans pump up the economy through military spending, as they have for the past quarter century, particularly in their Sunbelt electoral base. The collapse of aerospace is behind such stunning developments as Clinton's lead in Orange County. It also enables the Democrats to talk about economic conversion, planning, industrial policy. Clinton and the Democrats are running hard on this issue—here in California, building the majority of his events around these themes. There are also a number of California Congressional districts designed for Republicans where Democrats are campaigning on these themes as well—and may win. It's a stunning reversal. As recently as last year, most California Democratic leaders scorned industrial policy as something for Michigan, for a fossil economy. Now, with the cold war and communism both interred, it's no longer creeping socialism to plan new industries. It's just keeping up with the Germans and the Japanese.

Finally, the end of the cold war means the end of the national project of the past forty-five years. Bush is the last of a line of presidents, going back to Truman, elected to steer America's course against Soviet communism. But with the cold war over and the nation in decline, a new national project now faces us: the reconstruction of the American economy. There's no evidence that even a significant minority of the American public thinks George Bush is up to the task. There's abundant evidence to the contrary.

Somewhere in between politics and mass psychology, there's an intuitive popular understanding, I think, that the leaders of the last war are probably not suited to be the leaders of the next. Churchill ran up against this when he was voted out of power one month after the Nazis' defeat. And I've long thought that one element of Lincoln's and Roosevelt's greatness is that both had the good fortune to die with their wars.

That's why the key line in the Democratic convention was Mario Cuomo's, when he turned from recalling the ceremonies for troops returning from the Persian Gulf to his vivid depiction of an imagined victory parade in America's next war—the war for prosperity and social solidarity. "Step aside, Mr. Bush," Cuomo concluded. "You've had your parade!" The line dramatized the real power of the generational challenge that the Clinton-Gore ticket poses. It's not that it's the baby boomers' turn: generations don't necessarily get turns. It's that a new national project is now upon us, and that Bush is defined and limited, as Clinton and Gore are not, by his stewardship (such as it's been) of the old. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Iris Marion Young

THE SUPREME COURT AND ABORTION

During most of the abortion struggle in this century, the main political actors have considered the issue a matter of principle. Either the right to choose abortion stands as principle or it does not. Principled issues are clean, easy to settle conceptually, if not politically. People and nations of integrity do not compromise their principles; doing so amounts to selling them out. Hailed as a great compromise, the decision of the United States Supreme Court this past summer in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* has done just this. By legitimating a definition of the abortion issue as having two "extremes," and attempting to locate itself in the "middle," the majority opinion, despite protestations to the contrary, has played politics with women's lives.

We should not underestimate the extent to which the decision upholds the right of a woman to choose abortion. It upholds *Roe v. Wade*'s arguments for a right of privacy under the Constitution as covering the decision to have an abortion and acknowledges that nothing in the intervening years has invalidated those arguments. It warns those seeking to overturn *Roe* that such an action would undermine the rule of precedent and thus threaten the Court's legitimacy. Such strong language seems aimed at making it difficult for even a reconstituted Court to overturn *Roe* completely.

But in the *Casey* decision, the Court says for the first time that for the sake of encouraging childbirth, states may limit, constrain, and place conditions on the exercise of a right to choose abortion. The joining of the two statements—there is a right to choose abortion but states may restrict that right—is the supposed compromise. For those who see the abortion question as a matter of principle, however, whether pro-choice or anti-abortion, the decision is contradictory.

I would like to thank Marlene Fried, Candice Hoke, Mary Littman, and Carol Sylvestre for helpful discussions.

The right of abortion has been handed over to the hackneyed politics of committee chambers where compromise resolves political conflict. To treat a controversial issue as something about which we can compromise, negotiate, and horse-trade, it must have parts that can be added or subtracted. Hawks and doves can compromise on the size of the military budget, workers and managers can split the difference on wage increases. But we do not usually think about *rights* in this way. How can we have "more or less" of a right to vote, to speak freely, to own property in our own names, to sit at the lunch counter of our choice?

To define abortion as a matter of "more or less," the Court has encouraged a deconstruction of the right to choose: it has said that states may but need not fund abortion for poor women on Medicaid; that states may but need not provide abortions in state-funded hospitals; that there is no right to speak freely about abortion options in federally funded clinics. It has said that a woman does have the right to choose abortion without telling her husband, but if she is under eighteen she does not necessarily have the right to choose abortion without her parent's consent. By upholding the portions of the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act that require a woman to listen to a state-scripted, pro-childbirth lecture given by a physician, and to wait twenty-four hours before going ahead with her abortion, the Court has now left it to fifty state legislatures to cook up more "pieces" of the abortion pie, so some states will have larger and others smaller abortion rights packages.

The *Casey* decision makes it less likely than ever that the abortion question will be "settled" in U.S. politics, as some people thought it was in 1973. Instead, a bureaucratic morass will increasingly ooze around this right, confusing, hassling, and punishing women with unwanted pregnancies. Regulations will be written, debated, passed, challenged, overturned, refined, challenged again, in a never ending stream

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of laws, executive orders, legal briefs, bureaucratic forms, and data sheets. This likely proliferation of abortion policing and red tape appears particularly ironic at this time when the dominant political sentiment in most other spheres is to scale down state intervention and bureaucracy.

Apparently Justice Sandra Day O'Connor hopes to make constitutional history with her doctrine that states cannot put an "undue burden" on a woman's access to abortion. From the decision we know that the Court considers requiring a woman to inform her husband such an undue burden, but beyond that this standard is vague. Because pro-choice advocates are now trying to ensure fairness and uniformity in its implementation, it may be several months before the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act goes into effect. When it does, pro-choice advocates will then challenge it under the undue burden clause, and other states' abortion laws will also be challenged on these grounds.

Some well-meaning people appear not to understand why rules like a twenty-four-hour waiting period or parental consent for teens are burdensome. They forget that in the state of Pennsylvania, as in most of the U.S., abortion services are generally available only in sizable cities. Thus a large proportion of women seeking abortions must travel considerable distances. A twenty-four hour waiting period forces women to take more time off from work, make more child-care arrangements, and stay overnight in the city where they receive services. All of this adds considerably to the cost, inconvenience, and emotional stress of obtaining an abortion. When teens must face all these burdens and go through a court procedure if they do not wish to involve their parents in their abortion decision, the burdens become incredible. They must face a series of intimidating encounters with health providers, lawyers, and judges, figure out how to get out of school several times, keep their whereabouts secret, and often make several different trips—somehow getting money for fare or getting rides—to offices, courts, and clinics. These added burdens on both adult and teen women may delay the abortion itself into the second trimester, often adding to the cost and health risks of the procedure. In spite of such obstacles, the evidence indicates that putting conditions on abortion does not stop women from terminating pregnancies. Most women who seek abortions have given the matter much thought, and are quite determined not to bear an unwanted child.

The *Casey* decision opens the door to many other restrictions on access to abortion—such as requiring that abortions be performed in hospitals—that will add greatly to the costs of abortion. Increasing the costs of abortion burdens the women who have them, especially lower-income women. But many other people will also bear the additional costs of abortion restriction: taxpayers, who pay for forms, surveillance, regulatory agencies, judges' time, and so on; health care providers, who must reduce the amount of resources they devote to contraception education and services, gynecological check-ups, AIDS education, baby well-care education and services, because they must devote more resources to abortion-related services; concerned citizens, who give more time, energy, and money to supporting women seeking abortions and the providers that serve them.

In recent years hundreds of thousands of such activists have devoted a good deal of time and money to raising funds for abortions for poor women, providing escort services for women facing anti-choice efforts to block access to clinics, developing teen access programs, replacing federal funds withdrawn from clinics because they provide abortion counseling, bringing RU-486 from Europe in order to challenge its ban in the United States. The best strategy for ensuring access to abortion, I think, lies in maintaining and expanding such grass-roots self-organization. A slogan much shouted in the last thirty years, "Not the church, not the state, women must decide our fate!" must be taken more seriously than ever.

Pro-choice advocates cannot turn our backs on the state, and must continue to lobby, litigate, and elect pro-choice legislators. In spite of the predicted Bush veto, we should work to pass a national Freedom of Choice Act. But the law can at best give us only a framework for reproductive freedom, not the freedom itself. Abortion services have been closing down all over the United States, and many medical schools do not teach the procedure.

More than ever we need to expand activist networks in rural and urban areas to provide information and support services; provide transportation and housing; support feminist health centers with broad reproductive rights agendas; organize to demand that more doctors learn abortion techniques and perform abortions; give support and protection to doctors, judges, and other professionals who provide access to abortion in the face of threats and ridicule; learn woman-centered self-help techniques, including abortion techniques, ourselves. An expanded grass-roots movement of women and men committed to ensuring access to abortion, in the context of a broad program of reproductive rights, will best preserve access within the context of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

law, raise political pressure to remove legal impediments to abortion access and, if necessary, provide the infrastructure for outlaw activities to further women's control over our bodies. □

David J. Garrow

A LANDMARK DECISION

The U.S. Supreme Court's June 29 abortion decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania* v. *Casey* almost certainly guarantees that the central core of the Court's 1973 holdings in *Roe* v. *Wade* and *Doe* v. *Bolton* will never again be in any significant danger of being obliterated or overruled by the nation's highest court.

Activist groups on both sides of the abortion issue have a strong self-interest—financial as well as emotional—for refusing to consider whether June 29 will, in retrospect, be recognized as the final high-water mark of America's intense struggle over whether a woman's right to choose merits constitutional protection as an undeniable aspect of the individual liberty guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. But *Casey* very likely *is* that high-water mark, and if indeed it is, the joint opinion for the Court authored by Justices David H. Souter, Sandra Day O'Connor, and Anthony M. Kennedy will rightfully come to be recognized as one of the most important statements about individual rights and the judiciary's role in affording them constitutional protection issued by the Court in this century.

The landmark importance of the joint opinion in *Casey* has in part been obscured by the disingenuous reactions of leading interest groups, but knowledgeable Court-watchers and leading constitutional specialists quickly recognized what the Souter-O'Connor-Kennedy trio had achieved. Most notably, as Harvard Law School professor Laurence H. Tribe emphasized, the joint opinion "puts the right to abortion on a firmer jurisprudential foundation than ever before." Similarly, Linda Greenhouse of the *New York Times*—a truly gifted reporter and interpreter of the Court—characterized the joint opinion as providing "a tightly reasoned framework for a constitutional right to abortion" that was "in some respects . . . clearer and stronger than [*Roe*] itself." Unlike the 1973 opinions in *Roe* and *Doe*, where great emphasis was placed upon the medical history of abortion, in *Casey* both the joint opinion and the concurring opinions of Justices John Paul Stevens and Harry A. Blackmun focused on the undeniable centrality of the right to choose for advancing gender equality in present-day America.

Many statements in the joint opinion may come as very pleasant surprises to people who have only a gray, stereotypical image of Souter, O'Connor, and Kennedy. "Some of us as individuals find abortion offensive to our most basic principles of morality," said one section of the joint opinion read by Justice O'Connor from the bench, "but that cannot control our decision. Our obligation is to define the liberty of all, not to mandate our own moral code." Justice Kennedy, undeniably the most unexpected member of the pro-*Roe* majority, likewise orally delivered another portion explaining the constitutional importance of reproductive choice: "These matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." In abortion, "the liberty of the woman is at stake in a sense unique to the human condition and so unique to the law."

The joint opinion also reflects a clear-eyed realism about modern American life. "The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives," and "an entire generation has come of age free to assume *Roe*'s concept of liberty in defining the capacity of women to act in society, and to make reproductive decisions." While two decades of medical advances have "overtaken some of *Roe*'s factual assumptions . . . the divergences from the factual premises of 1973 have no bearing on the validity of *Roe*'s central holding, that viability marks the earliest point at which the state's interest in fetal life is constitution-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ally adequate to justify a legislative ban on nontherapeutic abortions."

But the remarkable stature of the *Casey* decision stems not only from the constitutional and social conclusions it articulates; it comes also from the special judicial forms that the Souter-O'Connor-Kennedy trio chose to employ. "Joint" opinions—those explicitly presented as multi-authored—are exceedingly rare in Supreme Court history, and are employed only on extraordinarily special occasions. The entire Court took that step in 1958 in *Cooper* v. *Aaron*, invoking all of its institutional stature to ringingly reaffirm *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka* in the face of Arkansas' official refusal to comply with federal court orders mandating the token desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School. For the trio to choose to employ the "joint" format was hence a conscious step of remarkable significance; for the three justices then to *each* deliver a portion of that opinion orally from the bench was an even more "extraordinary step," as the *Washington Post* noted; it may very well *never* have previously occurred in the Court in this century.

The relationship to *Cooper* and to *Brown* was clearly in mind. In the portion of the opinion read orally by Justice Souter, a section that Greenhouse rightly described as reflecting "a remarkable sense of personal passion and urgency," the comparison of *Roe* to *Brown* was made explicit, and Souter declared that "to overrule under fire in the absence of the most compelling reason to reexamine a watershed decision would subvert the Court's legitimacy beyond any serious question."

As New York University jurisprudential scholar Ronald Dworkin, writing in the August 13 *New York Review of Books*, accurately noted, the *Casey* joint opinion "may prove to be one of the most important Court decisions of this generation." And, as Dworkin similarly emphasized, the *Casey* majority's upholding of some of the Pennsylvania statute's anti-abortion provisions—particularly the twenty-four hour "waiting period" requirement—was explicitly provisional: "its decision on the point was tentative in a way that many newspaper reports have not made sufficiently clear." Pro-choice lawyers inescapably have several years of difficult lower court litigation ahead of them, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, to build a powerful and persuasive record of why "waiting periods" and mandatory doctor-patient readings of state-authored anti-abortion propaganda set-pieces are "substantial obstacles" or "undue burdens" to the constitutionally protected right to choose—litigation that will be difficult because of the plethora of hostile Reagan-Bush appointees now staffing lower federal courts—but that struggle too is a winnable one.

And it's winnable in significant part because of the Souter-O'Connor-Kennedy joint opinion's most important if nonetheless ineffable and subtle achievement: the final and much-delayed elevation of *Roe* to the special, "higher law" status accorded to initially controversial landmark rulings such as *Brown*. *Brown* itself took at least sixteen years to win meaningful acceptance and application, and the case upon which *Roe* was largely based, *Griswold* v. *Connecticut*, the 1965 decision eliminating the criminalization of the use of birth control and according explicit constitutional protection to a right of marital privacy, did not attain such unchallengeable acceptance until 1987, when its most notorious critic, Robert H. Bork, saw his attacks upon it rejected both by the Senate and—even more overwhelmingly—by American public opinion.

Without *Griswold*, without the legal recognition it gave to the potential expanse of reproductive liberty and autonomy, neither *Roe* nor *any* judicial recognition of constitutional protection for an individual right to choose abortion would have followed. But given *Griswold*, and the powerful influence *Griswold* had on early abortion activists, *Roe* was—as Justice Stevens noted in *Casey*—in many ways almost inevitable. As the *New York Times* recently declared, Justice Blackmun's 1973 opinions in *Roe* and *Doe* were "a brilliant resolution of seemingly irreconcilable interests." But very few people still appreciate that, in large part because most of the critical damage that *Roe* has suffered over the last two decades has been inflicted by *pro-choice*, not right-to-life, commentators. While the most notable salvo in this attack still remains John Hart Ely's April 1973 essay in the *Yale Law Journal*, formerly "liberal" columnists and journals continue the assault today. Undoubtedly the most notorious such voice remains the *New Republic*, which recently castigated not only *Roe*, for "creating by judicial fiat a right that should be protected by politics," but also by implication *Griswold*, which it termed "flimsy." While the *New Republic* volunteered that "We can imagine any number of plausible ways that *Roe* might have been clearly overturned," the magazine's editors failed to explain why if a woman's choice was indeed "a right," it should be protected only "by politics," and not by the Constitution and by the judiciary. Judge Bork, please call home.

But Bork and the *New Republic* are now far outside the constitutional mainstream, as the achievement of Justices Souter, O'Connor, and Kennedy in *Casey* so powerfully and surprisingly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

makes clear. And their greatest achievement, the elevation of *Roe*'s central holding to a firmer status than it ever before has attained, will, like *Griswold*, in all likelihood receive its most powerful affirmation in the world of politics, rather than in law: never again, after what Souter, O'Connor, and Kennedy have done, can *any* plausible nominee for the Supreme Court—irrespective of whom the president might be—go before the Senate Judiciary Committee and refuse to do anything less than to endorse *at least* the trio's joint opinion in *Casey*. Just as in recent years even Judge Bork had to stretch and tear all of his jurisprudential notions so as to fit a firm and explicit affirmation of *Brown* into his worldview, and just as nominees Kennedy and Souter felt bound to offer endorsements of *Griswold*, henceforth each and every nominee will have to endorse at a minimum the trio's articulation of individual choice as a Fourteenth Amendment liberty in *Casey*. Barring only the election of fifty or more Jesse Helmses to the U.S. Senate, *Roe*'s right to choose now stands more firmly and unchallengeably ensconced in American constitutional law than ever before. Many difficult pro-choice struggles remain ahead, but the biggest battle is now indeed over, even if the most committed partisans on both sides of the struggle do not yet recognize or acknowledge it. And for that, Souter, O'Connor, and Kennedy deserve significant credit. As Justice Blackmun himself said, the joint opinion was "an act of personal courage and constitutional principle," and one whose legacy, much as Blackmun hopes, will quite certainly prove powerful and enduring. □

Richard Rothstein

WHO ARE THE REAL LOOTERS?

The television reporter on the scene was incredulous. A looter, unconcerned with television cameras, police, or the stares of fellow neighborhood residents, walked by, arms laden with stolen property. The reporter raced after, trying to shove her microphone in the looter's face: "Why are you doing this?" The looter shrugged. "Don't you feel guilty?" the reported pleaded. "No," the looter said matter-of-factly, and walked off.

Another looter came by, also laden with someone else's property. "Why are you doing this?" This time the looter turned to the reporter and gloated, "Because it's free!"

Back to the news anchors. "Of course it's not free," one of them pontificated. The cost of looting, he said, is enormous: businesses destroyed, jobs lost to the community, lives wasted, children destined to go hungry, a generation's opportunities devastated. No, it's not free.

The looters, those grinning, arm-laden, amoral thieves, didn't stop to give their names to our on-the-scene television reporter. Who might they have been? We can only guess at their identities. But let's try. Perhaps we've run across them before.

This article first appeared in the *L.A. Weekly*, May 8, 1992, from which it is reprinted with permission.

One of the looters seemed to emerge from a store that sold electronic devices. Could he have been John Welch, Jr., chairman of General Electric, who oversaw increasing growth of RCA production work at his plant in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where unions are illegal; where teenage girls from rural villages can be had for factory assembly work at a wage of forty-five cents an hour, so long as their fingers are nimble; and where the supply of other girls to replace them is seemingly limitless? Did Welch feel guilty about the devastation of communities like Bloomington, Indiana, where five hundred RCA workers lost their jobs in the 1980s? Welch may have thought the profits were free. Perhaps the television anchor wanted to remind him of the cost to Malaysian girls crowded with a dozen others into one-room dormitories so they can work round-the-clock shifts. Or perhaps the anchor was thinking of a Bloomington woman, forced to sell her home after being laid off, because the only jobs available now are table waiting, at one-third her former wages.

Could one of the looters have been Raymond Hay, chairman and chief executive officer of the LTV Corporation, who put his firm into bankruptcy in 1986, claiming it couldn't afford to pay $2 billion in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

debt to its employees' pension fund? Hay expected the government's pension insurance plan to make up the difference, and it did so. But within a year, when LTV returned to profitability, the company refused to reassume responsibility for these pension payments. What the hey! said Hay. We thought pensions for our one hundred thousand steelworkers were free! We'll let sucker taxpayers underwrite them. And no, we don't feel guilty about taking our profits home.

Was one of the looters John Nevin, chief executive of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, who collected a $5.6-million bonus payment in 1986, two years before Firestone was sold to a Japanese firm? Nevin had certainly earned his bonus—by shrinking the company payroll by almost sixty thousand workers over the last seven years alone! Perhaps the television anchor was trying to remind this looter that $5.6 million can never really be free. Firestone once had a plant in Los Angeles, employing approximately three thousand workers under a union contract that provided decent wages, health benefits, and pension protection. Was our on-the-scene reporter trying to ascertain whether Mr. Nevin felt guilty about today's desperate residents of South-Central Los Angeles, who no longer have the industrial jobs with which families can be supported in decency? Or about the fact that Firestone took Nevin's $5.6 million as a business-expense tax deduction, helping to starve our public coffers of the funds needed for education, health care, and public safety?

Perhaps the looter was Frank Shrontz, chairman and chief executive of Boeing in Seattle, or Shrontz's vice president, Forrest Coffey. Boeing is Washington state's largest employer and, like other giant corporations, threatens to relocate unless it can avoid taxes that ordinary businesses must pay. Over the last two years alone, Washington paid blackmail of $900 million to Boeing in sales-tax exemptions. If Coffey had been asked whether he felt any guilt over stealing $900 million from Washington's public schools, he might have responded as he did last year, "Why should I give [the schools] more money? What do I get?"

Was Don Dixon, owner of a savings and loan in Texas, one of the looters spotted by our shocked reporter? Dixon took depositors' money and "lent" it to friends who had no means of repayment—the loans were for as much as $90 million each. For this kind of hard work, Vernon Savings and Loan paid Dixon more than $2 million per year in salary and bonuses in the mid-1980s, not including outright gifts to Dixon of a $2-million beach house and a $5.5-million art collection. On second thought, though, the looter on television probably wasn't Dixon. Dixon could never have claimed his loot was "free"—Vernon S&L paid out almost $50,000 to host fund-raising parties on a yacht in the Potomac for congressmen who might influence S&L regulators.

Perhaps the interviewer had run across one of South-Central Los Angeles' most notorious looters, Meshulam Riklis, husband of singer Pia Zadora. Eight years ago, Riklis, owner of the McCrory retail chain, took over Zody's discount stores, which provided merchandise as well as hundreds of jobs to South-Central residents. Though profitable, Zody's cash flow was not as lucrative as the real estate on which the stores sat, so Riklis slashed Zody's severance-pay policy for its 3,000 then closed the stores and sold the land. Meanwhile, Riklis rewarded himself with a gift from McCrory of stock in a McCrory subsidiary. Three years later, he sold the stock, clearing more than $1 billion. Riklis proved it: loot really is for free.

Or perhaps the looter was F. Ross Johnson, once president of RJR Nabisco, who "put the company into play" by trying to buy his own firm from its stockholders for $17 billion. As president, Johnson presumably knew what his company was worth, and in the bidding war that followed raised his offer to $25 billion. Was our on-the-scene reporter trying to find out whether Johnson felt guilty about trying to trick his own stockholders into selling their shares for $8 billion less than he knew those shares were worth? Or was the reporter trying to find out how Johnson felt when he lost the bidding war to merger artists (who bought the company with borrowed money) pledged to sell off most of the company in pieces to pay off their debts? Johnson probably didn't feel too badly. He also got some loot for free—as president, he had committed the company to give him $4 million in severance pay if control of the company changed.

Newscasters last week were shocked at the "carnival" atmosphere while looters smashed store windows and walked off with all the merchandise they could carry. Where have the newscasters been for the last ten years? The Reagan and Bush administrations have encouraged a decade-long carnival of looters, and the cost was high, paid mostly by former industrial workers who saw their jobs turned into gambling chips in a deregulated financial casino.

Can we have a civilized society if looting is the norm and getting something for free the ideal? Probably not, as events last week in Los Angeles showed. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard Schrader

THE FIASCO AT RIO

"Any time environmentalism is a big issue in the news, it's not to our benefit." So revealed a Bush campaign strategist to the *Wall Street Journal* at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janiero last June.

During the conference, third world and European nations alike criticized the isolated Bush administration's refusal to sign a treaty that would better conserve the world's diminishing animal and plant species. Germany, filling the leadership vacuum, pressed for radically stronger limits on carbon dioxide emissions to restrain global warming. Japan pledged a considerable expansion of its foreign aid budget to fund environmental programs in poor nations and seemed surprised that the United States offered so little.

Bill Reilly, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) chief administrator, was caught in an internal policy dispute that suggested the White House preferred the environmental policy of its conservative advisers and ultimately sabotaged his role as administration spokesperson. To top it off, Bush was overshadowed by the maximum environmentalist, Fidel Castro, who blamed the industrial world for a future ecological Armageddon. The entire event was not to Bush's benefit.

Environmental policy has reached a level of primary significance in the world community, equal in scope with the global economy and national security. The leaders of the world's poorest nations used Rio as a forum to call for a renewed attempt at redistributing wealth from North to South.

A kind of center-left effort to advance family planning as both a strategy for environmental protection and a way to achieve higher living standards was opposed by an odd coalition of Islamic fundamentalists, the Vatican, and some feminist groups that argued that government should not interfere with the reproductive rights of women.

The former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe competed with the South for substantial aid from the industrial North. The old Soviet bloc claimed that the road to a free market granted it special status in the world community, unchaining it from obligations to assist underdeveloped societies. The South interpreted this as the kind of avarice often seen before in the affluent, self-centered North.

Still, nobody was the target of more stringent criticism than the Bush administration. Bush balked at signing the so-called biodiversity treaty, which would protect plant and animal life, claiming that the agreement would imperil American jobs and limit the domestic development of biotechnology, an industry already embattled by legal and political challenges from health, labor, and women's organizations. He justified his own environmental policies, claiming "the leading record on forests and protecting the elephants."

To many participants, Bush seemed paralyzed by the dominant impulses of his Republican party. The internal battle over the treaty had been fought and decided months before the conference. David McIntosh, the executive director of the President's Council on Competitiveness, chaired by the increasingly visible Dan Quayle, had ruined the Rio treaty and the EPA's chances for success by savaging the policy in an April memo. He warned that the treaty would impair the ability of American corporations to protect their biological inventions and technologies overseas. Corporate profitability still remains the glue that binds the Republican elite, however saddened some of the weary old guard might be by the acid-death of trees.

During the summit's first week, McIntosh waited with a panther's patience for Reilly's recommendations. Reilly scrambled to find common ground with representatives of the 178 nations who were poised to sign the Treaty on Biodiversity with or without the United States. His memo, which suggested changes in diplomatic language that might reduce White House anxieties about technological transfers and the regulation of biotechnology, was once again eviscerated by McIntosh and his staff. Suddenly, the memo became public and captured the glare of some nine thousand media outlets. Bush's team had succeeded in turning a complicated diplomatic negotiation into a melodrama that cast the White House in the role of eco-outlaws. The geometry of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

political power has had a consistent configuration throughout the Bush presidency; in each instance the power arc has leaned toward protecting the polluters, not the natural resource.

Quayle's council had routed Reilly's EPA, and not for the first time. It would be hard to locate a policy debate in which Reilly has prevailed against Bush's corporatists.

Early in 1990 he was unable to block a council proposal that will expose half of the nation's wetlands to developers. New regulations required by the 1990 Clean Air Act have been suppressed because of the council's recalcitrance. A week before the Earth Summit, without public comment and again at the prompting of the council, Bush took administrative action that allowed companies to increase the emission levels of some toxic discharges.

Midway through the Rio conference, Reilly's position had become untenable; he had lost every major internal battle for months, was forced to defend policies not to his liking, then became the object of ridicule when his plaintive memo received more attention than his diplomatic initiatives. By the end of this long conference, a dispirited Reilly murmured to the media that someone did not want a successful summit. All of this contributed to a feeling of cynicism about the U.S. role at the conference. A senior American delegate told the *New York Times* that the leaked memo was a "little hand grenade" tossed by Reilly's bureaucratic opponents.

Many environmentalists would seem to agree that Reilly's nameless tormentors accomplished their goal. Greenpeace draped a banner across Rio's Sugar Loaf Mountain that censured the conference for selling out the planet. Some groups judged the summit a failure for not building a mechanism to oversee the transfer of resources from rich countries to poor ones; the delegates could not agree on a vehicle for carrying out the summit's recommendations. Even Rio's most public success, the legally binding Global Warming Convention, which recommends the curbing of greenhouse gases, could not get U.S. support without dropping all target goals for reducing emissions. A powerful statement, but without the teeth needed for enforcement and oversight.

Certain key themes were hardly broached. Overpopulation, the subject of a short and rancorous debate, was not addressed in any treaty or declaration. This was a hot button most delegates did not want to press. Although sparked by rhetorical flourishes, the conference also retreated from a collision with arguably the root cause of the earth's environmental decay: the wasteful habits of the industrial world.

Some environmental groups considered the summit not a failure vitiated by compromise, but an achievement that finally linked ecological safeguards with appropriate economic development. Both the Wildlife Fund and Natural Resource Defense Council were cautiously supportive of the process in their public comments. The Declaration on Environment and Development, though nonbinding and broad in principle, does give priority for substantial foreign aid to developing nations, those "most environmentally vulnerable" participants. Sustainable development, a catch phrase that appears in most accounts of the summit and its countless official documents, might bring together an international constituency of northern Greens and southern nationalists. Rio could prefigure a new post–cold war diplomacy that is fluid in its alignment and less confined by ideology.

Progressive academics, labor activists, women's groups, and whoever else might be in sympathy with social democracy have not often shared an affinity with the environmental movement. The antipathy has been mutual. Although many unions have supported vigorous clean air and clean water laws, labor leaders must protect jobs, while environmentalists want to close factories that spoil the sea and sky. The issue is frozen along these rigid lines by the media, the political forces involved, and those corporate and political leaders who benefit from this separation.

But the work that is necessary to renew the environment, in both its natural and humanmade form, will generate jobs. A typical large municipality employs an army of engineers, inspectors, scientists, and laborers to cleanse its water supply

ARE YOU MOVING?

•

Second-class publications are not forwarded by your Post Office, but returned (at senders' expense) to be repackaged and reshipped: . . . *Three postage payments, for us, plus weeks of delay*. . . . To avoid this, and help DISSENT, *please notify us one month in advance of your change of address*. Send both old and new address to:

•

DISSENT, 521 Fifth Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and dispose of its sewage. A national program that includes every urban center increases job opportunities by several orders of magnitude. The left has to fuse two impulses—full employment and environmental protection—to move an agenda.

A commitment from the federal government going even partly along the soft path explored at Rio, which protects forests and wildlife while sustaining our air and water, would invent appropriate technology on a New Deal scale. □

Joanne Barkan

ITALY: THE POLITICS OF DISINTEGRATION

No sable-hatted bureaucrat with a corner office in the Kremlin ever held onto power and privilege more tenaciously than the gaggle of political bosses who run Italy. Thus anyone in the past who bet on a thorough (and much needed) shake-up of the Italian political scene was working with truly lousy odds. Until this summer, I wouldn't have risked money on it. But now chances of a major party realignment look less improbable. In the foreseeable future, Italians might enjoy a real choice of governments—more progressive or more conservative—a choice most Europeans take for granted.

Unfortunately the shake-up, if it happens, will not be the direct result of the normal democratic process. The striking results of national elections last April seemed to count for nothing at first. Instead it took the spectacle of grotesquely brazen Mafia assassinations and a kickback scandal of operatic proportions to jangle the nerves of the "political class."

Italians voted on April 5 for a new Parliament. They trooped to the polls in the usual large numbers (87.2 percent of the electorate participated), and, as expected, they voted against the traditional parties, which have served up decades of asphyxiating rhetoric, bumbling coalition governments, and a society whose every board of directors and back office is chopped into fiefdoms and doled out to the party faithful according to a perverted extension of the proportional representation system—the larger the party, the more spoils it controls.

Citizens battered the old guard: the Christian Democrats won only 29.7 percent of the vote (−4.6 percent relative to the 1987 parliamentary elections). The Democratic Party of the Left took 16.1 percent, and Communist Refoundation 5.6 percent (−4.9 percent for the two groups that once comprised the Italian Communist party). The Socialists took 13.6 percent (−.7), and the Social Democrats 2.7 percent (−.2).

Newcomers and protesters made out better: the League (a right-wing populist group, born in the North, that stands for regional autonomy if not demagogic separatism, strict limits on immigration, lower taxes, and economic efficiency) soared from 1.3 percent nationally to 8.7 percent. *La Rete* (the Network), a new mix of reform-minded Catholics and assorted leftists, won 1.9 percent. The Republicans, who had quit the government to protest its incompetence, climbed from 3.7 to 4.4 percent. The Greens rose from 2.5 percent to 2.8 percent.

The scattershot voting, made possible by Italy's exaggerated version of proportional representation, delivered thirteen parties to Parliament and little likelihood of political stability. The pundits called it an earthquake. *Now things will change!* they crowed. *The voters have sent a clear message.* Never, however, has an earthquake rattled so few so little. What followed the election were two long months of *déjà vu*: the same pols jockeying for the same political plums. Who would get to be president? Prime minister? Cabinet minister (thirty or so of these prizes)? Undersecretary (seventy or so of these)? The squabbling sounded worse than usual because the old governing parties had less legitimacy, and the newcomers and opposition parties put up a bigger fuss.

As the dust settled, the picture of post-earthquake Italy became visible: it looked exactly the same. There was Bettino Craxi, secretary of the Socialist party (PSI), angling for the presidency or prime minister's job. No matter that he had declared in an interview to *Le Monde* on April 3, "In the case of defeat, I will withdraw." And there was Arnaldo Forlani, secretary of the Christian Democrats, handing in his resignation to the party leader-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ship—as one might expect after his organization's worst defeat in postwar history. He waves goodbye to reporters and is whisked away in his chauffeured car; his cronies beg him to reconsider, and the next thing you know, he's back in charge.

Business as usual . . . until May 23, when a powerful, remote-controlled bomb, carefully positioned beneath a highway outside Palermo, blew up the motorcade of Giovanni Falcone, the dynamic magistrate heading up the effort to prosecute *mafiosi*. Politicians in Rome appeared not only helpless to deal with organized crime run rampant, to most Italians they looked like buffoons in their inability even to organize themselves into a government. The extremity of the situation temporarily mobilized Parliament. Two days after Falcone, his wife, and three bodyguards perished, legislators came up with a president for the republic: Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, a Christian Democrat but not the usual "inside player." Everyone labeled his election an "institutional" (as opposed to a "political") solution.

Meanwhile a massive kickback scandal in Milan mushroomed into something qualitatively new. It overwhelmed the personal power base of Bettino Craxi, grand vizier of the Socialist empire since 1976. One by one, the scandal toppled the lieutenant in charge of the powerful PSI apparatus in Milan who happened to be Craxi's son, Bobo; a former mayor of Milan who happened to be Craxi's brother-in-law; and several of Craxi's closest friends and longtime political associates. His enemies (with former Communists in the lead) jumped at the opportunity to squash his bid for a top government post. Craxi put up a good fight but on June 18 finally okayed someone else as prime minister: PSI Vice Secretary Giuliano Amato. Naturally many Italians assumed at first that Amato would simply carry out Craxi's orders, but commentators believe Amato's independent streak will show precisely because Craxi is tangled up in the biggest mess of his career.

Prime Minister Amato's wafer-thin majority in Parliament could snap anytime; and Craxi, a gold-medal tactician, could come from behind to reestablish his control. But under the Mafia gun and threats from a European Community that wants to see some economic discipline, Amato has half a chance to run a more effective than usual administration.

Other consequences of a long-term setback for Craxi could be much greater, especially for the Italian left. If Craxi's grip on the PSI really slips, a new leadership group is ready to step in and, for the first time in thirty years, build an alliance to its left. In the space created by the global collapse of communism, the protagonists of party realignment and left unity in Italy have already made their first moves.

The entire affair has been orchestrated as one of those very public, secret maneuvers. Left-leaning PSI leaders disaffected with Craxi have been meeting with leaders of the *riformista* wing of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). These PDSers are equally disaffected with what they see as their party's dead-in-the-water politics under Secretary Achille Occhetto. The two contingents are discussing the possibility of a federation pact, a joint working group in Parliament, and the formation of local federation clubs around the country. They've already drafted a manifesto and are planning a programmatic forum for the fall.

How serious is this effort? The participants are political leaders and members of Parliament less tarnished than the average. The PSI group clears everything with Claudio Martelli, Minister of Justice and once a Craxi protégé. Martelli has distanced himself from his mentor, and some observers believe he's ready to spring for Craxi's spot at the first opportunity. Martelli has yet to attend any joint strategy meetings (one journalist compared him to Mario Cuomo: always on the verge of doing something), but he's publicly declared himself for unity on the left and an end to the old multiparty coalition governments that straddle right and center-left. Like other progressive advocates of party realignment, he wants to break Craxi's long-standing alliance with the Christian Democrats.

If the left ever manages to pull off this realignment, a political epoch will finally close. After 1948, two simple rules shaped Italy's postfascist democracy: the Communist party could not participate in a national government; the huge Christian Democratic party could not go into the opposition. As the Christian Democrats gradually lost strength (but remained Italy's largest party), coalition governments became dependent on the PSI. Rather than implement agreed-upon programs, all the political partners dug into the spoils. Yet as rotten as the system became, it wasn't politically or numerically possible to chuck the Christian Democrats and fashion an alternative.

Since the end of the cold war (and the renaming of the Communist party), most politicians agree *in theory* that any party can now govern or go into the opposition. But realignment will require electoral reform. The system of proportional representation needs adjustment so that elections produce fewer but stronger parties. Some Italians want proportional representation scrubbed altogether and replaced with an American winner-take-all system. But here's the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rub: significant reform will kill the system that the governing parties know and love. In the brand new parliamentary commission that has just inaugurated the second decade of debate on electoral reform, the usual bosses will continue to squawk and stall. Only the atmosphere of crisis (created by the Mafia challenge to the state, economic stagnation, inflation, and a budget deficit that's 11 percent of GDP) and the belated acknowledgement of the electorate's anger make anyone think that this round of reform talks might produce results.

Yet realignment will do nothing for the left unless the Socialists have some credible partners. The beleaguered PDS, still the largest party on the left, could play a key role. But so far, only its minority *riformista* faction shows enthusiasm for the new alliance. The *riformisti* know they must persuade the larger center faction (where Secretary Occhetto presides) to come along. Occhetto murmurs interest now and then, but he fears alienating the PDS left faction. His nightmare is yet another split. In the commotion over dropping the name Communist (and all that it implied about reforming as opposed to rejecting capitalism), Occhetto lost about a quarter of the party in 1991. The group that quit reconstituted itself as Communist Refoundation.

Both Communist Refoundation and the left PDS faction claim they won't touch a Socialist party that governs with the Christian Democrats and reeks of the same corruption. Instead they've agreed to work together against the Amato government. Their position on alliances could conceivably change if Craxi is deposed and the PSI moves sharply to the left, but for now their goal is a rambunctious opposition. Behind their choices—and beneath the debate that's ripping apart the PDS—lurk old, old questions. How do you radically transform a system if working within it requires that you always shore it up? When the act of governing yields only imperfect reforms and corrupts the actors, is governing a better choice than forever relinquishing power to forces you deplore?

The questions sound like anachronisms—relics of the age that preceded Thatcher-Reaganism. Somehow leftists elsewhere learned to live—painfully for the most part—with compromise. Perhaps the sheer size of the Italian left (close to 50 percent of the electorate in the 1970s) and its remarkably radical character in the postwar period created expectations that die hard.

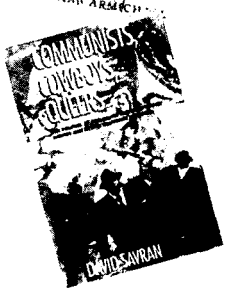
Occhetto has refused to lead his party in any direction. According to critics, his paralysis is destroying the PDS. Membership is plummeting (1.5 million in 1989, 1.1 million in 1990, and 827,500 in 1991). The party has flopped in local as well as national elections. In some locales, the faction fights rage. In others, activists are making the choices that Occhetto avoids: they're hooking up with the PSI or Communist Refoundation. And more than a few are just going home to wait for what they call the Second Republic—a political phoenix that will emerge after the current republic burns itself out.

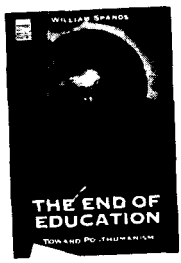
A cartoonist could depict the predicament of the PDS in this way: a pile of metal shavings is being pulled apart by two magnets, one to the left and one to the right. No pun intended, this image is sadly ironic. Occhetto and his leadership group built their argument for changing the name of the Communist party around the notion of a magnet: the renamed party, with its dual purpose of vigorous opposition and dynamic governing, would act as a magnet, pulling together all those pieces of the left driven asunder by the prejudices of the cold war. The destigmatized former Communists would finally be able to draw in left-wing Socialists, radical Catholics, independents, and new social movements. The up-to-date party would provide action far more radical than the PSI but more grounded in reality than the old-style left. The description sounded something like that famous Third Way—the alternative to both desiccated social democracy and discredited revolution.

By proposing a magnetized Third Way as the model for the left, Occhetto was actually carrying the torch of Italian Communism into the postcommunist era. In the 1970s under Secretary Enrico Berlinguer, the Communist party billed itself as neither Leninist nor social democratic; it rejected banal reformism, but never defined its alternative to capitalism; it called its strategy the Third Way. The vision once captivated a third of the population. No more. Occhetto's modernized variant didn't rouse the masses. PDSers who are moving toward realignment with the Socialists or alliance with Communist Refoundation have rejected paths they can't see in favor of well-worn roads.

Assuming the realignment project doesn't collapse, it seems to offer the PDS the best, perhaps the only, alternative to relentless decomposition. A redrawn political map for Italy that includes a potentially majoritarian, left-reformist alliance would be a step forward for the entire left. Maybe it can happen—but only risk-lovers should place bets. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





minnesota

David Campbell
Writing Security
United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity
"Campbell writes with fluency and thinks indepth about post-war U.S. foreign policy, challenging an orthodoxy of thought that has delimited debate and forestalled change in international relations."
James Der Derian
$19.95 paper $44.95 cloth

Virginia Carmichael
Framing History
The Rosenberg Story and the Cold War
"An important contribution to our understanding of anti-communism and American culture of [the postwar] era. Carmichael's use of historical sources and arguments is simply superb; indeed it provides one of the most fully realized explanations for Cold War anti-communism that I have encountered." *George Lipsitz*
$17.95 paper $44.95 cloth

David Savran
Communists, Cowboys, and Queers
The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams
"Passionately conceived and beautifully articulated . . . illuminates an entire cultural epoch." *Edmund White*
$16.95 paper $39.95 cloth

Harvey J. Kaye
The Powers of the Past
Reflections on the Crisis and the Promise of History
"At once scholarly and highly readable, learned and full of personal passion. It is also crucial, because what is at stake here is the unfinished struggle, not just the writing but the making of history." *Daniel Singer,* The Nation
$14.95 paper $39.95 cloth

William Spanos
The End of Education
Toward Posthumanism
"A powerful argument against and brilliant analysis of the liberal humanist project."
Peter McLaren
$24.95 cloth

Amy Kaminsky
Reading the Body Politic
Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers
Proposes a Latin American feminist criticism that is both regionally specific and in current dialogue with North American and European feminist practices.
$13.95 paper $39.95 cloth

at bookstores or from:
university of MINNESOTA press
2037 university ave. s.e.
minneapolis, mn 55414
1-800-388-3863

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jonathan Frankel

AFTER THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS: "THE RABIN ERA"?

On Friday, June 26, immediately following the elections, one of Israel's leading papers chose as the banner headline on its weekend magazine, "The Rabin Era!" And it may well be that we shall eventually come to rank 1992, together with 1967 (the Six Day War) and 1977 (the start of the Likud ascendancy) as a year which opened a new, crucial stage in the history of Israel.

But even if that proves to be the case, it should not blind us to the fact that this was the narrowest of victories. True, it did not look like that at first. As the polls closed on Tuesday night, June 23, I gathered with friends to hear the results of the exit poll conducted by Israeli national television. At 10 PM, Israel's leading television announcer, Haim Yavin, appeared on the screen and, after a minute or two of preliminaries transparently intended to stretch the nerves of his captive audience, the nation at large, to the breaking point, declared simply, "Yes, there's been an earthquake!"

As the numbers came up on the screen, wild excitement broke out in the room. What we saw was, in Israeli terms, a stunning landslide: Labor, 47 seats; Meretz (the bloc of the three parties more dovish than Labor), 13 seats; the predominantly Arab parties, 4 seats. This would have meant that Labor and Meretz, with exactly 50 percent of the Knesset, could have set up a coalition government alone, counting on the Arab grouping to join them in defeating votes of no confidence by a margin of 64 to 56. Although nobody expected Rabin to opt for so narrow a coalition, his mere ability to toy with it as a theoretical possibility would have provided him with a parliamentary base stronger than that held by any prime minister since Golda Meir.

Of the many opinion polls published on the eve of the elections, only one had predicted anything like this. The others had suggested, variously, a narrow (perhaps a one seat) victory for the bloc led by the Likud, an equally narrow victory for the left (including the Arab parties), or a dead heat. All this hinted at an election too close to call, with a new Likud, or a renewed National Unity, government as distinct possibilities.

In Israel, because the soldiers' votes are counted separately, there is always a delay of a few days before the final election votes are announced. When they did at last appear, it turned out remarkably that the exit poll had been wrong and the opinion polls, for the most part, right. In the final count, Labor received 44 seats and Meretz 12, leaving the so-called left five short of a majority. The Arab parties, in the end, by the skin of their teeth, won five seats: a grand total of 61. The shift of an infinitesimal number of votes would have resulted in a dead heat between the two blocs.

Rabin, moreover, had made it known long before that he would not include parties that openly declared their sympathies for the PLO, meaning the predominantly Arab parties, in any government of his. (This position, incidentally, is criticized by many commentators in Israel, but nobody expected Rabin to change his mind now that he was situated in what could be seen as a position of weakness.) All this meant that he had to find extra coalition partners from within the enemy camp, the bloc of parties that had been grouped around the Likud.

Given the photo finish result, it is hardly surprising that immediately after the elections there was some renewed talk of another National Unity government to be formed with Labor and Likud as the senior, or even the sole, partners. The model to follow would have been that of the government set up in 1988, and not the one of 1984, meaning that there would be no rotation and that Rabin alone would serve as prime minister. Certainly, Likud politicians now made strenuous efforts to hold together their bloc of 59 seats in the hope of establishing an impregnable bargaining position.

It was at this point that the crack in the non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox ("haredi") camp became of key importance. Two parties in this category competed in the elections, winning ten seats between them. Both had pledged their support to the Likud

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

during the campaign. On the face of it, this was surprising. Given their single-minded concentration on obtaining government funding for their yeshivas and schools, it would clearly have made more sense to declare their neutrality, in order to sell their support to the highest bidder. This was all the more true because neither of these parties is committed to the Greater Israel ideology of the Likud; their leaders, a colorful combination of venerable Talmudists and streetwise (sometimes sleazy) politicians, include both doves and hawks. But their ill-planned attempt in March 1990 to bring down Shamir's government and replace it with one under the leadership of Peres had ended in a fiasco, both humiliating and extremely unpopular among their supporters—hence, their penitent pledges of loyalty to Shamir before this year's election.

With the results announced, the preeminent leader of the haredi camp, Rabbi Shach, insisted that the ultra-Orthodox Knesset members should keep their word and rebuff the overtures coming thick and fast from Labor. This may have been a popular stance among the rank-and-file haredi voters, but it did not go down well with many of the political leaders, for whom wheeling and dealing is a way of life. One of them pointed out on the long night following the elections that his party had promised to join the Likud in government, not in opposition.

Nonetheless, Shach might well have prevailed except for a careless and costly slip which he had made shortly before the election. The man is remarkably energetic for his age—he is in his nineties—and when necessary thinks nothing of traveling around the country to lobby in support of his very firmly held views. But he is sometimes carried away by his own rhetoric. In a widely reported phrase, he declared that the Israelis of North African origin (he was presumably referring to those who are Orthodox) had come a long way over the years but were still not ready to assume leadership positions. But one of the two ultra-Orthodox parties, Shas, had been set up specifically to represent a North African constituency; and it won six seats, while the predominantly Ashkenazi party, Yahadut Ha-Torah, won only four, a net loss of three compared with 1988.

Shach's insult, the catastrophic decline in the electoral strength of his closest disciples, and Shas's relative success, gave Shas—and its spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (the retired Sephardic Chief Rabbi)—the courage to strike out on its own, something which in the final resort it had been unable to do in 1990. It was Shas which gave Rabin the votes he needed to put him over the top, enabling him to present his government to the country with all possible speed on July 12.

Of course, the true surprise is not that Labor won by the skin of its teeth, but that it won at all. At the time of the Madrid Peace Conference, some six months before the elections, the opinion polls were predicting that Labor would win a mere 22 seats. What made these survey results particularly alarming was the fact that in the three previous elections (those of 1981, 1984 and 1988) Labor had enjoyed huge leads some months ahead of election day, only to see them whittled away. It was no wonder that a mood of pessimism enveloped the opposition camp. It became the accepted wisdom that Labor would have to wait until 1996 for a chance to return to power.

Even in an era where public opinion in democratic countries is becoming ever more volatile and unpredictable, it is extraordinary for a party to double its strength in the space of six months. It took a most improbable succession of events to produce the final result. (It is not unusual these days to hear wholly secular Israelis, not in the habit of invoking the deity, forced to fall back on the traditional concept of the miracle when talking of what happened.)

First, the Labor party had to put its house in order or, at the very least, bring itself to present an acceptable front to the electorate—a task that for long had looked far beyond its capability. The bitter historic rivalry between Peres and Rabin, which had flared up again; the memories of the humiliating failure, redolent with corruption, to set up a Labor government in 1990; and the party's ties to Histadrut enterprises tottering on the brink of bankruptcy, all combined to suggest that any changes would be too little and too late.

But it did not work out that way. For years, the general secretary of the party, Micha Harish, an unobtrusive man, anything but charismatic, had been quietly preparing something of an internal revolution in the structure of the party. By dint of persistence, hard work, a careful act of balancing between the rival camps within the party, and (when necessary) sheer threats, he had managed to slot a series of reforms into place just in time for the election year. Filling a post held at various times by people with an unusual flair, such as Giora Rosenthal, Golda Meir, and Lova Eliav, it is Harish who, in his own understated way, may have achieved the most.

With growing astonishment, the public watched a succession of events which suggested that the Labor party, far from being moribund, was, if not alive and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well, at least alive and capable of kicking. In November 1991, the party held a well-publicized conference in which a threatened walkout by the group of (relatively) young doves led by Haim Ramon was avoided; a series of intense debates were staged; and a dramatic show of unity put on at the end to round it all out.

On February 20, a primary election open to the rank and file (some one hundred thousand members voted) was held to choose the party leader. A primary of this type in one of the major parties was without precedent. In order to defeat the incumbent, Shimon Peres, in the first round, Rabin needed to come first out of the four candidates with at least forty percent of the vote. He did so by a margin so close that the result remained uncertain throughout the entire night.

The slightest tilt the other way would thus have ensured almost certain defeat in June—given the profound antipathy for Peres among significant sections of the electorate, especially those of North African origin. The fact that Peres nonetheless almost won should probably be seen as an indication of how little chance the party was reckoned to have had even by its own faithful (as well as of the deep distrust felt by many for Rabin after his conduct as Minister of Defense during the intifada). As a final flourish, the primary system was also employed again for the first time on April 1 to select the list of party candidates for the Knesset election. The result produced some dramatic surprises—the young dovish maverick Avrum Burg in third place, for example—and received a good press.

In the meantime, while Labor was putting on this show of self-rehabilitation, the Likud, which had been riding a wave of popularity only a few months before, was doing the exact opposite. Its candidates were selected by an entrenched system which had sometimes worked well in the past but proved disastrous this time. The choice was made by the Central Committee of the party, a large body of a few thousand but one divided into rival camps. Deals between Prime Minister Shamir, Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Housing Minister Ariel Sharon culminated in a series of defeats for David Levy and his followers so severe that he resigned his post as Foreign Minister in protest. He eventually retracted his resignation but the declarations he had made in the interval, accusing the party leadership of discriminating against Jews of North African origin, must have done the Likud immense harm. To cap it all, on April 13, the formidable State Comptroller, Miriam Ben Porat, published an unprecedentedly sharp report on malpractice in government, particularly in Sharon's Housing Ministry. The massive publicity given to her findings represented yet another devastating blow to the Likud just two months before the elections.

Finally, there is the question of the loan guarantees. It has been said in various circles (Clinton Democrats, certain American Jewish commentators, some Likud supporters in Israel) that Bush's denial of the guarantees played no significant role in the Israeli election. And it is true that there was little overt debate about the loan guarantees during the campaign. Shamir, in opposition to Sharon, decided in the end not to run the Likud campaign against the White House. And Rabin went to great lengths to avoid appearing to be Bush's poodle—hence his insistence that he would not halt all building in the territories, whatever the President and Secretary of State might want.

But the issue of the guarantees was always there just below the surface. Labor made it a point to promise a reordering of national priorities and spelled out clearly that this meant far less investment beyond the green line (that is, beyond Israel's pre-1967 borders) and more in Israel proper, especially in job creation. The country's increasing isolation in the world was a related theme which cropped up during the campaign. Labor did much better than originally expected among two swing groups—the recent Russian immigrants and the middle class in the main urban centers, professionals and business people. The determination of Shamir to accelerate settlement in the occupied territories, even if it meant forgoing the loans, was in all probability crucial in alienating voters in both categories. After all, unemployment is running at close to 12 percent and it is much higher among the immigrants, whose reports back to the former Soviet Union are so negative that most of their families and friends have decided to stay put for the time being.

It is enough to consider for a moment what would have happened if Bush and Baker had given in. The Likud would have received an immense boost to its self-confidence. Shamir would have been presented, and truthfully so, as the man who had stood up to the President of the United States and stared him down. It was, after all, possible to continue to have one's cake and eat it, too. The entire world might criticize the policy of massive settlement in the territories, but that was, in the last resort, mere talk.

If the guarantees had been granted, there would be no Labor-led government today and Shamir would, in all probability, be prime minister. Fortunately, the Bush administration stuck to its guns and defeated AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents, and the American Jewish establishment, who appear to have forgotten that what counts ultimately in politics are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not intentions but consequences. Shamir was clearly working to turn Israel from a democratic and largely mono-national, into an apartheid-type, binational state. Organized American Jewry, which once counted such figures as Judah Magnes, Louis Brandeis, and Nahum Goldmann among its leaders, has apparently opted for making loyalty (however blind) and unity (however artificial) its highest values. It has become a strange case of the means justifying the ends. Fortunately, there were Jewish commentators who had the courage to point out the obvious—that a vote for the guarantees was a vote for Shamir—and Arthur Hertzberg, Anthony Lewis, Michael Walzer, Michael Lerner and Henry Siegman certainly earned their place of honor in this saga.

Are we witnessing a turning point in Israel's history? Or a mere pause in the onward march of the right?

Labor certainly has won an unusual chance to reshape the political culture of the country. It is true that it won by the narrowest of margins. But everybody was struck by the degree to which the atmosphere this year differed from that prevailing in the campaigns since 1981. Until the late 1970s, Israel was a country which luxuriated in heated but civilized debate at every level of society. The long hours of empty time characteristic of army reserve duty were often spent in political discussion. In retrospect, it may well be possible to see that, somewhere inside themselves, the less educated members of the public resented what they very probably saw as a certain arrogance among their more fortunately placed protagonists. Once the Likud was firmly established in power, the period of such free and easy discourse came to an end, giving way to an era of ill temper, public disputes, and simmering violence.

In these elections, the overt excitement was gone, but so was the anger. People appeared eager to exchange views, listen, discuss. The absence of such charismatic figures as Menachem Begin no doubt contributed to this development. Few (the supporters of the Lubavitcher Rebbe apart) expect miraculous changes. If this shift were to prove permanent, the sign of a maturing political climate, it will make it far easier for Labor and the left to defend their case in the future.

It also has to be remembered that the Likud party (as distinct from the bloc of parties associated with it) took a terrible beating in the elections. It had 41 seats in the last Knesset; it ended up with only 32 in this. Voters from its natural constituencies defected both to Labor, which under Rabin's leadership directed its major effort to winning over disgruntled Likudniks, and to the radical right. Taken together, the parties which positioned themselves to the right of Likud on the territorial issue (Tsomet, Moledet and the National Religious Party) went up from twelve to seventeen.

The chickens have finally come home to roost as far as the Likud is concerned. Is it to turn to the right as Sharon (and, in his own low-key way, Menachem Begin's son Benny) urge? Or is it to battle Labor for the middle ground, as David Levy and Moshe Arens suggest? The ideological issue is combined with the fight for the succession. Arens, Shamir's heir apparent until the elections, stunned his party by announcing his retirement immediately after them and by saying in interviews that he had never fully identified with the Greater Israel faith of his movement.

It is the accepted wisdom at the moment that the party leadership will pass to the younger generation, with Benjamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu as the clear favorite. If that turns out to be the case, he will prove a formidable opponent in the next election. In the meantime, Sharon and Levy will not surrender without a hard fight. Labor could well continue to benefit for a few years from the wild disarray in the Likud.

For his part, Rabin is already seventy years old. A chain smoker and (as rumor has it) a heavy drinker, is he going to be able to lead the party into another election? Certainly he gives every sign of being a man in a hurry. His whirlwind round of activity immediately after the elections, with visits to Cairo, Kennebunkport, and Washington; the quick succession of decisions announcing a partial freeze on construction in the territories; and the early renewal of the peace talks; all suggest that he's determined to act as a man totally different from the Yitzhak Rabin who found himself catapulted into the premiership in 1974. The hallmark of his three years then as prime minister was ultra-caution. In the end, thanks to Kissinger's endless shuttle diplomacy, disengagement agreements were achieved with Egypt and Syria, though Rabin rejected the suggestion of the Secretary of State to start a similar process with Jordan, a truly fateful act of political cowardice which hastened or even caused Hussein's abdication of responsibility for the West Bank to the PLO. When Begin came to power, he did far more in a few months to achieve peace with Egypt than Rabin had done in his three years.

It remains to be seen how much Rabin has really changed. He aims to have an elected Palestinian authority and some form of autonomy in place by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spring of next year. But will he have the vision and generosity to build up the relatively moderate Palestinian leadership which is in grim competition with the forces of Islamic fundamentalism in the occupied territories? How is he going to handle Jewish settlers who state openly that they will not recognize the autonomous authority, not even as traffic police?

And what of the Syrians? Rabin's stated position is that the issue of the Golan Heights should be postponed to a later stage of the peace process. He knows, of course, that the Syrians will not agree. Can they be bypassed? The chances are that, too powerful and too ruthless to be ignored, they will be able to sabotage plans which leave them out. Rabin's appointment of Itamar Rabinovich, a leading scholar of contemporary Arab affairs, to lead negotiations with Syria, suggests that he may be ready to modify his public stance on this issue. Whether he is temperamentally capable of a truly bold breakthrough (and, of course, the same question applies to Assad) remains to be seen.

Following the elections, many articles appeared in the Israeli press noting the apparent poetic justice in the recent events. Rabin had been prime minister in the period leading up to Labor's historic defeat by Menachem Begin in 1977 (resigning only a few weeks before because of a scandal). Now Rabin has the opportunity to turn the tables. And there are those who go back further still. They remind us that Rabin, as a young officer in the left-wing military unit, the Palmach, commanded the gun battery that sank the *Altalena*, a ship in which Begin was bringing weapons for the right-wing underground in 1948. This was the beginning of the end for both Begin's Irgun and Shamir's Lehi (the "Stern Gang").

Those were dramatic events indeed, but the man in charge then was David Ben Gurion; Rabin was acting on orders. Can he now, as a seventy-year-old man, finally refute the theory that native-born Israelis make excellent soldiers but blinkered politicians? □

Erazim Kohák

TATTERED VELVET: A COUNTRY FALLS APART

PRAGUE, SUMMER 1992

Western media have dubbed Czechoslovakia's breakup a no-fault divorce. Now the two newly elected protagonists, Václav Klaus, the prime minister of the Czech republic and architect of Czechoslovakia's economic transformation, and Vladimír Mečiar, a former communist, now a nationalist and the prime minister of the Slovak republic, are sparring to shift the blame for the divorce on the other. In both parts of the country there remains a lingering affection for the old Czechoslovakia, a great deal of mutual good will and determination that all things be done decently and in order, but little will to seek another compromise. Ironically, the great achievement of Václav Havel's velvet revolution may be that the breakup will be minimally disruptive and even amiable.

That, clearly, is not what Havel wanted. His post-election speech in the federal parliament was nothing short of magnificent. This was a man and a leader, nailing his velvet banner to the mast. His was a fervent statement of faith in the ideals on which his great predecessor, T.G. Masaryk, had founded the country. Two years ago, those same ideals won Havel the love of his compatriots and the admiration of the world. It was difficult not to stand up and cheer.

The only trouble was that by the time Havel got up to give his speech it was all over. In the election, the voters in both parts of the country massively rejected the men of the velvet revolution. In the Czech lands, they opted for Václav Klaus's ultra-Thatcherite prescription for an economic miracle, in Slovakia for Vladimír Mečiar's nationalist socialism. The subsequent defeat of Havel's bid for reelection in two parliamentary ballots confirmed the obvious: the newly elected Slovak leaders are no longer willing to march to Havel's vision of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Czechoslovakia. Perhaps October 28, the anniversary of the country's founding in 1918, will prove a symbolically appropriate date for its formal dissolution.

In most other countries, the fading of an ideal might be no more than an episode between two elections. The sheer ethnic and geopolitical fact of a Poland or a Hungary would carry the country through until the mood of the electorate shifted. Czechoslovakia, unlike its chief component, the ancient Czech kingdom, was neither an ethnic nor a geopolitical fact. From its very founding, it was the land of an ideal. What fused together its disparate components was the lofty personality of its first philosopher-president, T.G. Masaryk, and the ideal he held out to the citizens, of tolerance, good will, and human decency, of freedom and democracy. That is what made Czechoslovakia so resilient—and also so vulnerable. A country of an ideal can survive only by the ideal on which it is founded. By the time Havel and his velvet warriors took up its fallen banners, that ideal had been badly battered by decades of nationalism and communist rule. It is not surprising that they failed.

Since the small-minded ever take a vindictive pleasure in treading upon the fallen great, the muckrakers have set about finding the fatal flaw that brought about Havel's downfall. Such nitpicking utterly misses both the man's greatness and the magnitude of the forces with which he had striven. It misses the greatness: after years of sordid pettiness, Havel held out a lofty ideal of truth, love, and reconciliation. His velvet warriors, shouldering the burden of power in a society on the verge of collapse, not only managed to prevent an explosion but succeeded in laying the foundations of a free society. Though the age cried out for vengeance, there were no purges; though there were plenty of witches, there were no witch hunts.

Self-styled "anticommunists" now like to quip that in the velvet revolution power passed from communists to former communists. Not so: the great achievement of that revolution was that power passed from the communists not to their "anticommunist" mirror image but to democrats committed to freedom and justice. The parallel with President Andrew Johnson, struggling to carry out Lincoln's policy of malice toward none, of charity and justice toward all in a vengeful time, is striking. Under Havel's leadership, Czechoslovakia managed to build up the rudiments of democratic institutions and to make the difficult transition from a collapsing command economy to a promising market-based one. Gradually, it is rebuilding a free press and a democratic educational system. In two short years it had gone a long way toward building not just an "anticommunist" society but a genuinely open, tolerant, and democratic one.

Then why the thermidor? And if there is no fault, why the divorce? As in all no-fault divorces, the catalogue of slights is, by and large, both legitimate and utterly beside the point. The Czech-Slovak marriage did not fail because of Czech insensitivity and Slovak immaturity, though both were real enough. It failed because, except among a minority of Czechoslovak loyalists, the two partners remained *you* and *I*, failing to generate the common *we* without which marriage remains an arrangement of [in]convenience, doomed to failure.

In order to form a common state, a human community does not need a shared language or ethnic identity. Switzerland is a case in point. It does, however, need common memories and common hopes. Czechs and Slovaks made little effort to forge a common understanding of their past or a common vision of their future, though the possibility was there. Though sharing a country, few Czechs bothered to understand how the Slovaks felt about it, and vice versa.

A dramatic case in point is the Munich agreement and the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands. For the Czechs—and for those Slovaks who identified with Masaryk's democracy—that is the darkest hour, the day of infamy. For other Slovaks, though, it is a time to celebrate. Hitler in fact did not occupy Slovakia but established it as a nominally independent puppet state. That state may have been fascist—its extermination of Slovak Jews was as rigorous as the German—but it was Slovak for all that, their own state at last. Even the Hlinka Guards, the Slovak equivalent of the German SS, were not alien intruders, as the SS were in the Czech lands, but their own, as Slovak as the army proudly fighting alongside Hitler's forces on the eastern front. Besides, in contrast with the prolonged, merciless economic depression that marked the final years of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak state was prosperous, as an agricultural country is bound to be in wartime. For a great many, life in the Slovak state was good.

For democratically oriented Slovaks as well as for all Czechs, not the Slovak state but the heroic, bitterly fought Slovak uprising against the fascist regime symbolizes the true spirit of Slovakia. In it, Slovakia rejected its fascist image and reentered the community of free nations and Czechoslovakia as an equal partner. The communist regime, though, made mockery of that equality and exploited the uprising as a communist achievement, effectively discrediting it in the eyes of many Slovaks. Today Czechs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remember a Nazi occupation; most Slovaks remember the Slovak state.

The two nations have different memories of the communist era as well, especially of its final twenty years. For the Czechs, the years since the Soviet occupation were a time of political repression, economic decline, and ecological devastation. In Slovakia, the repression was not nearly so severe. While leading Czech intellectuals were purged and consigned to samizdat, most of their Slovak colleagues were able to survive in the margins of legality and publish legally. There were many discontented Slovak intellectuals, but few outright dissidents.

Economically, too, the late-communist era was for Slovakia a time of relative prosperity. The industrialization of Slovakia was bringing about a change of life style and a rapid rise in consumer standards. The communist government had, since 1953, followed a policy of redistribution, channeling Czech surpluses to Slovakia. Under Gustav Husák, himself a Slovak, that policy was pursued vigorously. While the Czech lands visibly disintegrated, life in Slovakia was reasonably good. For that reason, too, there was much less enthusiasm for the velvet revolution in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. To most Czechs, Havel appeared as a savior at the last moment. To many Slovaks, he appeared as another Czech busybody interfering disastrously in Slovak affairs.

The very different development of the two lands after the velvet revolution seemed to bear out that perception. In the Czech lands today, the flurry of economic activity is reminiscent of Germany in the early 1950s. Privatization—in effect a sale of all economic assets hitherto held by the government, at bargain basement prices, often to investors from abroad—created a sense of instant prosperity. A massive influx of tourism brought in additional huge sums of hard currency. Small businesses are sprouting everywhere, long-neglected cities are beginning to emerge from ruins, unemployment is low and hopes high, even among those not sharing directly in the boom.

In Slovakia, the mood is very different. Only 6 percent of the influx of foreign investment capital has gone to Slovakia. Tourists find Prague an easy drive from Germany, but few bother to make the long journey to Slovakia. The Slovak armament industry has been hard hit, both by Havel's decision to phase out the arms trade and by the flooding of the market with surplus Soviet ordnance. Unemployment is high. The recession contrasts with the relative prosperity of the final communist years. "Under your Havel," I have been told repeatedly, "everything is more expensive." Alas, it is. It makes Slovakia an anomaly: the one country that has positive memories of both the Nazi and the communist eras and misgivings about what came after them.

Most judicious observers—including the former Slovak prime minister, Ján Čarnogurský—admit that independence is more likely to aggravate than to solve Slovakia's problems. That, though, does not speak to the genuine and legitimate Slovak longing for a state of their own after years of often benevolent, but even more often heavy-handed Czech tutelage. In a referendum, a majority of Slovak voters might still favor a common state, for reasons of convenience. So, for sentimental reasons, might a majority of Czech voters, though here there has been a heavy backlash, triggered by what the Czechs perceive as Mečiar's nationalistic histrionics. It would, alas, be a marriage of [in]convenience, doomed to failure. Though in many ways we belong together, we have failed to build up a shared or at least a harmonious sense of our history or of our future. Whatever the voter sentiment, the two governments are committed to two incompatible courses, each for what it regards as good reasons.

The Czech government of Václav Klaus is committed to a radical Thatcherization of both our economy and our society. Riding his electoral victory, the prime minister told us that our task is to combat socialism, not primarily in its crude Soviet form but in the insidious creeping form poking up its horns in countries like England, Sweden, or Austria. After more than a generation of cold-war propaganda, most voters are prepared to believe that the economist von Hayek's version of economic liberalism is the only true democracy and road to prosperity, and that any deviation from unrestricted economic individualism would be the road to serfdom. The slogan of the day is privatization. We are likely to see a wholesale dismantling of our system of social and infrastructural services in the name of freedom. One of Klaus's campaign slogans was that competition will solve the ills of our health-care delivery system, presumably as it did in the United States. As for ecology, the prime minister told us that it is the icing on the cake and that we can eat our cake without icing. Economic "growth" comes first. Given a Czech parliament wholly dominated by a libertarian right with a strong support of the clerical right, our next four years are likely to bear the stamp of Thatcher and Reagan. Our most urgent task is to rebuild a Western-style society and the new government is convinced that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that is the way to do it. Having lived in America during the Reagan years, I am rather less convinced of it.

The Slovak alternative is hardly more appealing. The mechanisms that brought it relative prosperity with Czech subsidies and a ready Soviet market for its goods are not likely to function without those. Slovakia is in no position to duplicate the Czech economic minimiracle. It has a difficult time attracting capital. Even its domestic capital—the privatization coupons—tends to flow to the Czech lands. Restricting that flow might require measures of which Keynes would approve no more than von Hayek. With its high unemployment levels, Slovakia needs to maintain a high support level as well, even at the risk of inflating its currency. That, though, is entirely incompatible with Klaus's careful monetary policies as well as with his policy of deregulation and privatization. Whatever the voters' preference, by this fall the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic is likely to have become the Czech and the Slovak republics.

What that will mean for Slovakia is problematic. Major economic hardship, certainly. But the Slovaks are a tenacious, hardworking people with a love of their land that is far deeper than Mečiar's nationalism. What it will mean for the future of freedom in Slovakia is another question. The model of the wartime Slovak state is not inspiring. Nationalism is never conducive to liberty: in his last fireside chat, Havel reported that during his last visit in Bratislava a woman handed him a bouquet—and was promptly beaten up by bystanders. Having achieved their national state, the Slovaks might find it a mixed blessing.

The Czechs might well make a similar discovery. In contrast to Slovakia, the Czech short-range economic prospects are excellent. Capital is flowing in, small enterprise is booming, tourism is flourishing. The Czechs have all the prerequisites for duplicating the German economic miracle, albeit on a more modest scale. In addition, they have a tradition of democracy to fall back upon. When the social and ecological bills of Reaganomics come due, the Czech society is far more likely to develop a democratic center-left opposition than to fall back upon its communist past. Yet having achieved what they in turn wanted, the Czechs might find that in an ecologically precarious world a runaway consumer spiral is also a rather mixed blessing.

What, though, of Havel and the velvet revolution? For the moment, they have been put on hold, to put it mildly. While Prime Minister Klaus might tolerate Havel as a figurehead president of the future Czech Republic, Havel's commitment to ecology and his repeated criticism of consumerism are too far out of line with the new government's policies for that to work out.

Yet while Havel's velvet ideas are equally out of tune with Slovak nationalism and with Czech consumerism, they are far more in tune with global reality than either one of them. Both European and global integration make the point that nationalism is a destructive anachronism. If humankind is to have a future, it lies in the direction of Havel's vision of civic reconciliation. The Rio de Janeiro conference showed no less convincingly that if humankind is to have a future, it has to turn from its preoccupation with individual affluence in Havel's direction, toward a global concern for humankind and for its natural environment. Today, consumerism, too, is a destructive anachronism.

Václav Havel, ironically, might well prove more powerful out of power than in power. For the moment, the Czechs and the Slovaks alike are preoccupied with making up for the stifling years of communist rule. The Slovaks need to act out their independence before they can recognize the value of integration. The Czechs, it seems, must have their taste of affluence before they can appreciate the virtues of a living standard free of both the fear of poverty and the decay of affluence. Both need a vacation from reality and, Havel or no Havel, are determined to have it. Vacations, though, cannot last forever: reality is pressing in all around us. When the Czechs and the Slovaks wake up from their postcommunist dreams, they will find themselves coping with a reality far more in line with Havel's ideas than with those of their present elected representatives.

In the meantime, though, we need to keep the vision alive. That may well be Havel's most important task—and the one for which he is best suited. The world, finally, needs a conscience far more than yet another president.

POSTSCRIPT: After this was written, Slovakia declared its sovereignty, Havel resigned as president, the Slovak government renationalized its near-monopoly in publishing, and Havel stated that "the new Czech statehood must have its spiritual and moral dimension. . . [based on] . . . the tradition of faith, spirituality, tolerance, education and so forth . . . represented by Wenceslas, Charles IV, Hus, Chelčický, Comenius, George of Poděbrady, the [Moravian] Brethren and also T.G. Masaryk. Certainly, we have other, possibly as strong traditions as well, as for instance Czech scab tendencies [*Kolaborantství*] or Czech garrulousness." Havel's hour, it seems, might come sooner than I had thought. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robert Heilbroner

AN ECONOMY IN DEEP TROUBLE

Proposals for Improvement

It has been a long time since I can recall such an atmosphere of economic pessimism. For two years now we have heard that the recession was over, or soon would be over, or in any case wouldn't get worse, certainly not much worse; but this R-talk is sounding ever more hollow, as the economy slogs along, with stubborn unemployment, sluggish sales, and a pervasive gloom you could cut with a knife. In fact, I suspect that we will not know we have turned the corner until someone in the next administration—let us hope that it *is* the next administration—finally explains that we have been going through a long and sapping depression, and that the challenge of the next decade is to pull ourselves out of it.

The depression is not at all the kind of catastrophe we experienced in the 1930s. In that near-mythic collapse, gross national product fell by almost one half over four years. By way of putting things into proportion, our own GNP, corrected for inflation, has fallen by barely more than 1 percent from its peak in 1990 to its trough in the second quarter of 1991. Since then it has risen slightly, and is today about 1 percent higher than that low point. If 1929 measured nine on the Richter scale, this is barely one.

Unemployment, similarly, has not shown the horrendous deterioration that we still carry in our minds as constituting a "real" depression. Between 1929 and 1934, the number of unemployed increased 800 percent. In our case, it has increased by less than 50 percent, counting from 1989, when unemployment was "only" 6.5 million, to today's levels, when it hovers above 9 million. Nine million unemployed is indeed an "army," but it is not an army of twenty-five million, which it would be if we were to duplicate the thirties.

I begin with these comparisons because it is important to recognize the differences between then and now if we are to plan intelligently for the future. In the 1930s we were experiencing a kind of collapse that is no longer a threat for an advanced capitalism—namely, an economic contraction in which an initial shock, no worse than many we have suffered since, feeds upon itself until it becomes a social disaster. Such a debacle can only take place in an economic system that lacks institutional safeguards to block these cumulative possibilities—unemployment insurance, a central bank prepared to ease credit in bad times, an agricultural support system, Social Security payments. None of these existed in the 1930s, so that once the economy tipped off center, it entered a condition of free fall, precisely as we would have, at the end of the eighties, had not Federal Deposit Insurance prevented the S&L collapse from repeating the 1930s, when a similar failure wiped out nine million savings accounts.

Then why the gloom today? I think two explanations can be given. The first is that we have become increasingly aware of the damage that was incurred but ignored during the Reagan years. One aspect of this damage was an unprecedented maldistribution of income. We now have the statistical evidence that at least 60 percent and perhaps 70 percent of the entire increase in wealth over those years went to the top 1 percent of families. Thus the much touted "longest period of uninterrupted growth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in our history" was in fact a time when the seventy-odd million families who make up the lower four-fifths of the nation suffered declines in income that were masked in the national aggregates only because of huge gains for the approximately ninety-five thousand topmost 1 percent of households. In actual figures, the average incomes of these households rose from $314,536 (in today's dollars) to $675,879. Average income for the lower 80 percent shrank by about 7 percent.

This extraordinary redistribution from the bottom to the top was the most dramatic, but by no means the only symptom of deep-rooted trouble in the economy. The eighties, like the twenties, were a period of superficial prosperity that masked dangerous structural developments. As in that earlier time, one of these developments was the havoc wrought by financial speculation in the business sector. In the 1920s, this took the form of corporate pyramids that milked the earnings of operating units below into the coffers of holding companies above. In the 1980s much the same process appeared, as leveraged buyouts and unfriendly mergers also used the earning capacity of profitable companies to finance extraordinary reorganization schemes whose only purpose was to funnel wealth to strategic holders at the top. In the 1920s, the orgy ended with a crash—or rather, with The Crash—leaving much ruination behind. In October 1987 we actually suffered a stock market crash that was more precipitous and deeper than that of 1929, although the determined efforts of the Fed prevented the crash from generating tidal waves of bankruptcy. Nonetheless, when the orgy of the 1980s was over, the organizational results were much like those of the earlier period. Leftovers from the dismantling operations of the merger movement littered the beach, but not a single new world-class organization had emerged from the melée.

I could go on with dreary comparisons—in the 1930s we gained our Hoovervilles, in the 1980s our homeless—but I do not want to lose my point by suggesting that the depression of the 1980s was a carbon copy of its infamous predecessor. I want only to make clear that it *was* a depression—contained and restrained by the safeguards of modern capitalist policy, but real enough, nonetheless, to demolish the widespread belief that the American economy, because of these safeguards, had rid itself of its tendencies to develop systemic malfunctions and structural faults.

That awareness, I think, contributes to understanding the mood of the present. But there is another, and perhaps more important, explanation. It is a growing concern that the future offers nothing beyond a return to the trajectory of the very years we have been discussing. For all the severity of its specific problems, the root cause of the hidden depression was a laggard pace of growth. There is a simple and vivid way of illustrating this. Looking back over the profile of growth that stretches from the early 1950s up to the 1970s, we find that real per capita income grew fast enough to allow an average American, by his or her middle years, to enjoy a standard of living twice as high as that of his or her parents. During the years of the hidden depression, as we have seen, most American households actually suffered declines in real income. But even if we construct an "average" American whose income grew because it included a share of the bonanza returns of the top 1 percent, it would have taken a hundred years before such a person would have had enjoyed the gains that his or her parents had known in half that time.

Thus the most discouraging aspect of the hidden depression has been its slowdown in the rate of economic expansion. I say the most discouraging because, for all their extent and damage, the problems of lopsided income distribution, concentrated urban poverty, financial destruction, and the like can be met with some kinds of remedies and countermeasures. This has not been the case with sluggish growth. Economists have long been aware that economies, like trains, travel over two tracks, express and slow, the first giving us generation-long periods of rapid economic progress; the second, lengthy periods of relative stagnation and slow growth. A number of theories have described the "long waves" that result from traveling first on one track and then on the other, but the theories have not suggested

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

policy measures to shunt the economy from the wrong track to the right one.

Recently, the economist Edward Nell has helped us understand the problem better by giving the name "transformational growth" to growth along the fast track. As the name indicates, transformational growth gains its vitality not merely from the exploitation of the existing array of business opportunities or from the opportunities offered by individual breakthroughs out of it, but by the emergence of new sectors and salients that transform the array as a whole. These may be institutional as well as technological innovations—the "invention" of the corporation was surely as important for late nineteenth-century prosperity as was the Bessemer process—but in either case the transformations radically change the entire business outlook, moving out the production-possibility frontier, to use economists' jargon, which for once is vividly illustrative.

The main transformational booms of the past are familiar to us as the first industrial revolution, the railroadization and later the electrification of the nineteenth century, and, of course, the automobilization of the 1920s. We had another such boom after World War II. One aspect of it was the economic modernization of Europe, a transformation as far-reaching as any of its classical predecessors. Another aspect was the revolutionary technologies of the jet plane, which laid the basis for mass tourism, the world's largest (trillion-dollar) new industry, and the computer, which altered the organization of business itself more radically than the advent of the typewriter. Not least was the rise of public expenditures of all kinds from an average level of 10 percent or less of Western GNPs before the war to between a third and a half of GNPs within two decades of the war's end. This constituted nothing less than the replacement of the defenseless, depression-vulnerable economy of the 1930s by the relatively depression-proof welfare state of the 1970s.

This brings us to the present. The postwar transformational boom petered out in the mid-1970s. To say this is not to diminish the scientific virtuosity or the importance of such new developments as genetic engineering or ceramic materials or high-definition television but only to express disappointment with regard to their effects on the production map of the economy. In the same fashion, the initial surge of confidence and buying power that accompanied the emplacement of the welfare state has been followed by a growing awareness of its problems, above all the increased susceptibility to inflation traceable to the very gains that a welfare system engenders in the working class. Thus the economy since the 1970s has displayed the sluggishness characteristic of all slow-track periods, played out in a new institutional environment of contained rather than self-feeding contractions. What is discouraging about this, as I have said, is the absence of any plausible policy to get us back on the fast track. Lower interest rates or lower taxes or other nostrums may get us back to the growth path of the 1980s, but the genie of fast growth remains in the bottle.

Now comes a remarkable opportunity to launch a transformational boom without the necessity of a vast restructuring of production similar to those of the past. The opportunity lies in building up the underpinning of public capital on which the private economy rests. As we will see, such a program would serve us in precisely the same manner as would a more pioneering transformation. And there is one additional consideration. An infrastructural boom cannot be launched by any other industrial nation—because they have already done so. The unique opportunity available to the United States is to restructure our economy simply by catching up with the competition.

Infrastructure, as everyone knows by now, is a general term covering public capital. Its conventional components are highways and bridges, dams and sewer systems, but include as well components that do not so quickly spring to mind: air traffic control networks, weather satellites, National Institutes of Health, R&D centers, public education, and the like. All these play the same role in enhancing productivity as do advances in machinery or organizational efficiency in the private sector.

The transformational potential of a massive buildup in infrastructure arises not because of any intrinsically greater productivity of public

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over private projects but because the stock of public capital has so deteriorated that additions to it exert more leverage on output than equivalent additions to the private sector's stock of capital. The deterioration reflects another area of damage of the Reagan-Bush years. According to the figures of the Office of Management and Budget, federal investment in public capital has been cut by a third from 1976 to 1990: education and training by almost 40 percent; physical capital by 30 percent; research and development by the same. Independent estimates by David Aschauer, to whose investigations we owe much of our belated recognition of the importance of infrastructure, show that the rate of nonmilitary public investment in the 1980s was only half that of the preceding decade and only one-fourth that of the 1950s and 1960s. This is a ferocious gutting of our public capital, without precedent or purpose.

Two consequences have followed. The first is serious injury to the productivity of the private sector. Aschauer's research reveals that a dollar spent for public investment raises GNP by two to five times as much as a dollar spent for private investment. These figures were originally looked on with skepticism, but Alicia Munnell, director of research at the Boston Federal Reserve, has recently testified that they are now widely accepted as true.

The second consequence is that the neglect of our public capital has widened the gap between European and Japanese performance and our own. Aschauer's researches also show a powerful, but previously unrecognized correlation between the rate of public investment and the growth of productivity in seven industrial countries. The best performer has been Japan, whose ratio of public investment to GNP over the past years has been some twenty times greater than that of the U.S. and whose rate of productivity improvement was six times ours; the next best was Germany, which outspent the United States on infrastructure by ten to one and outstripped our productivity growth by four times; and so on down to Canada, which only improved its productivity three times as much as ours and only exceeded our ratio of public investment to GNP by twice. This disheartening recital of neglect is, of course, the reason why the United States has an opportunity for transformational growth that is not available elsewhere.

Aschauer's findings have laid the basis for an emerging consensus on the need for restoring our public capital. Of key importance here are two factors: what kinds of public investment and how large an overall program. Because of the obvious importance of the second question, there is a tendency to overlook the first. It may well be that a labor-absorbing, general-purpose infrastructural program, such as the New Deal's famous Works Progress Administration (WPA), would be necessary to offer quick economic relief to inner cities. Some of these programs, moreover, could well be turned into permanent sources of employment by using federal funds to establish city employment corps for neighborhood rehabilitation, park improvement, school maintenance, and the like, along the lines of the equally famed Public Works Administration (PWA) that gradually displaced much of the WPA.

I suspect, however, that the leverage of an infrastructure boom will depend to a considerable extent on investment spending that would bring us up to, perhaps even slightly ahead of, the production frontier of our principal competitors. This suggests such projects as bullet trains linking the main American cities, modernization of our antiquated air traffic control system, an extensive research effort to make solar energy a major source of power. Of even greater strategic importance would be a major effort to raise the quality of U.S. education to European levels and to institute a comprehensive apprenticeship program for all noncollege-bound high school students (we are the only large industrial power without one). Without the human capital embodied in an educated work force it is doubtful that we will be able to participate effectively in any future private change, much less play a leading role in bringing one into being.

It is one thing to describe the possibilities of such a program; another to face its difficulties. Here we come to the problem of costs. They must be much larger than anything we have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard about. Congress, for example, has recently appropriated $150 billion for upgrading our transportation facilities: Felix Rohatyn points out that Taiwan has appropriated $600 billion for the same purpose. Rohatyn himself urges that we spend $1 trillion over the next ten to fifteen years to build up our public capital, an appropriation dwarfing that suggested by Ross Perot. I have myself said that a program of transformative investment that originated in the private sector could easily require $2 to $3 trillion of financing over the ten years or so of its buoyant first phase, and that I see no reason to believe that a public-sector boom would cost less.

How can one raise these very large sums of money? Here again, I find an analogy with a private-sector boom helpful. After the initial expenditures of such a private boom had been made, further investment would be at least partly paid for by the revenues of the new products and processes already brought into being. In similar fashion, there is reason to expect that a public-sector boom, after its initial phase, could finance its further phases at least partly by additional tax revenues—the public equivalent of the additional sales of the private sector. Moreover, if tax returns were not sufficient to help pay for the remaining projects, they could be easily increased: the United States suffers from the lowest tax "return" to GNP of any other OECD nation. If we had a German return, for example, our tax revenues would be higher by almost $300 billion a year; if we had a French tax structure, revenues would increase by double that.

But what of the initial decade, when hundreds of billions would be disbursed before large flows of revenues could be expected to materialize? Once more an analogy with the private sector is useful. How would the great corporations finance a $2 or $3 trillion investment boom? The answer is that they would use the savings of the American economy through issues of new equities and bonds. The option of issuing new equities is not open to the U.S. Treasury, but that of tapping savings through issues of bonds is certainly available. Thus the principal way in which a transformational boom could be financed would be essentially the same whether it were carried out under private or public auspices: funds would be borrowed to pay for the capital costs.

There are, of course, other ways of helping to defray the costs, mainly gasoline taxes and borrowing from pension funds. Whatever the means, however, borrowing from some source—corporations, funds, banks, or households—is certain to be a mainstay of any financing operation. This brings us to the near-pathological issue of the deficit. I say "near-pathological" because I doubt that one person in a hundred among the millions of Americans who oppose the deficit would be able to explain what it is. I do not refer here to the technical problems of how the deficit is measured—Robert Eisner, a past president of the American Economic Association, has recently described a half dozen entirely defensible ways of calculating the 1991 figure, ranging from $321 billion to a *surplus* of $71 billion. My reference to pathology refers simply to the fact that I doubt very much that many people know that the deficit is, by definition, equal to the nation's borrowing.

Once these simple words are said it becomes inevitable to ask: "Borrowed for what?" In the household and the corporate sectors, that question is easy to answer. Money borrowed to pay for ordinary expenditures that ought to be financed by regular household income or company revenues is almost always ill-advised, whether from the viewpoint of the borrower or the nation as a whole. On the other hand, money borrowed for capital-enhancing purposes—the financing of a young person's education or a promising business venture—is usually a wise financial transaction that will pay for itself many times over, for borrower and the public alike.

Can we not say the same for federal borrowing? The astonishing answer is that we cannot—not because the division between wise and unwise borrowing is not entirely applicable, but because federal borrowings, unlike those of any other entity, are not identified by purpose. The chairman of a great bank once said that a corporation that ran its books the way the federal government does would be stopped by the SEC from issuing further securities. Unlike any corporation, most states,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the majority of other industrial nations, we have an indiscriminate category called "a deficit," which includes all borrowings for whatever purpose. Its effect is to level the charge of profligacy and waste against all borrowing, good as well as bad.

Thus an adequate approach to financing a transformational boom will await the rational design of the nation's finances, principally by introducing the idea of a capital budget that separates public investment from ordinary, operating expenditures like congressional salaries or the pay of the armed forces. Whether such a reform is imaginable today, when both the president and the public support a balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution, is unlikely. Perhaps it may become less so tomorrow, if the public comes to realize that such an amendment would effectively end all public investment that cannot be paid for by taxation, which is to say, end any possibility of using the federal budget to launch this country into the only transformational trajectory that now seems available.

This last point brings us to the core of the question. It is not difficult to spell out the dimensions and promises of a large public investment program that might put us back on the growth path that petered out in the 1970s. The many problems of such a transformational boom—its inflationary pressures, its foreign exchange ramifications, its pull on our store of savings—are real enough, but their difficulties lose much of their force once we realize that precisely the same questions would have to be faced were the boom to originate in the private sector. The nation's economy responds in complex ways to an investment boom, but it does not ask where the dollars come from, only how many there are.

The great barrier that towers like a steep escarpment ahead is therefore not the financing of the deficit nor the design of an intelligent policy that would guide its application nor the redress of the inevitable mistakes and misdirections that would accompany it in practice. It is the difficulty of persuading the American public—and perhaps even more necessitously, the elites in political, corporate, and academic life—that a vigorous, active public sector is a legitimate part of modern capitalism. For whatever reasons, that seems to be a determination that the country cannot make. Virtually every other capitalist nation has come to see its public sector as an indispensable partner in its long-term future. The United States, almost alone, persists in viewing the government as an enemy within the gates or at best a necessary evil that must be tolerated, but cannot be encouraged.

This is stunningly confirmed when we ask why David Aschauer's original research created such a stir. The answer is that the national income accounts—and worse, the models by which private economists picture the workings of the economy—have no category for public investment! Private spending is carefully divided between consumption and capital building purposes, the latter universally extolled as the source of growth. But all government expenditure is treated as consumption. It is therefore automatically removed from consideration as a source of growth on a par with, perhaps even more important than, private investment.

This is not the place to speculate about the basis of this American economic fundamentalism. I shall simply end by drawing my own conclusions with respect to its consequences. If the United States finds no way of forging a new partnership between its public and private sectors, I see no chance that we can enjoy, at least for a long while, the social and economic benefits of another great transformational period. □

This article is the first in a series on the American economy; further articles will appear in later issues. This series has been made possible by a grant from Harry Kahn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nicolaus Mills

THE CONFLICT AT CATERPILLAR

The UAW in the "Post-Strike" Era

PEORIA, ILLINOIS

Will it play in Peoria? If you think of the history of this town, where Lincoln and Douglas debated on the courthouse steps and Charles Lindbergh once flew the air mail, it seems like the right question to ask. But according to the 1990 census, taking the pulse of Peoria no longer promises reassuring answers about middle America. Peoria is in trouble. Its population and real estate market are down, and its manufacturing jobs have gone from 53,350 in 1978 to just 32,000 in 1991.

For the American labor movement, Will it play in Peoria? is, however, a key question for the 1990s. At a time when the number of strikes involving a thousand or more workers has dropped from an average of over three-hundred a year in the 1960s to just forty in 1991, the struggle being waged by the United Auto Workers (UAW) against the Peoria-based Caterpillar company, the world's largest manufacturer of construction and earth moving equipment, has become a test case. At issue is whether a major manufacturing company like Caterpillar can, by threatening to replace its striking work force, neutralize what up to now has been labor's ultimate weapon. As University of California labor professor Harley Shaiken observed in April, "This is a watershed strike. It will define labor relations for the nineties and define the way U.S. firms compete in the global market."

Last November the United Auto Workers struck Caterpillar. This April, 163 days later, the UAW's 12,600 strikers went back to work under a Caterpillar-imposed contract. The UAW's decision to send its strikers back to their jobs came just eight days after Caterpillar threatened to replace any UAW worker who failed to return. At an April 14 press conference, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Bill Casstevens insisted that the UAW was being "statesmanlike" and responding to the recommendations of Bernard DeLury, the director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. "We're not going to be negotiating on the company's last offer. We're going to be negotiating on our own offer," Casstevens declared. Casstevens's claims do not, however, reflect the position the UAW finds itself in at the moment. Technically, the strike—although not the picketing—at Caterpillar continues as far as the UAW is concerned. But after five months off the job, Caterpillar's workers, many of whom lost upward of $15,000 between November and April, are no closer to the contract they want than they were last fall.

If only wages and health benefits divided the UAW and Caterpillar, this strike could be settled. The differences between the union and the company are not overwhelming. The UAW is seeking a top minimum wage of $40,458 by September 1994. Caterpillar is offering $39,915. The union wants to keep its current health plan, which involves company-paid premiums at any hospital. Caterpillar wants workers with two or more dependents to pay premiums of nearly $30 a month and to cover full medical expenses only with designated providers.

But in this strike wages and health benefits are merely a point of departure. At the core of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the strike is the UAW's determination to continue the pattern bargaining it has had at Caterpillar since 1958 and win from it a contract comparable to the one it signed with John Deere in October 1991. Caterpillar counters that as a global competitor, which makes 75 percent of its products in America and exports 59 percent of them, it deserves a settlement different from the one negotiated with a company like Deere that focuses on the domestic market.

Most important, Caterpillar's demand for give-backs has boxed the UAW into a corner. The settlement Caterpillar has imposed promises to gut the union's ability to represent its work force. The contract Caterpillar wants the UAW to sign guarantees a two-tier wage system in the coming years. It undermines seniority, curtailing a worker's ability to transfer from one Caterpillar unit to another if his job is eliminated. It cuts over-time, allowing the company to put a worker on a "flex" schedule that makes weekend hours or a ten-hour day routine. Above all, it threatens future jobs, providing six years of security for those now at Caterpillar in exchange for the company gaining the right to reduce its work force by attrition or by contracting out jobs.

What brought the United Auto Workers to this crossroads did not happen over night. Since it began representing Caterpillar workers in the late 1940s, the UAW and the company have always had a tough time negotiating contracts. In 1979 the UAW waged an 80-day strike with Caterpillar and in 1982–83 fought a marathon 205-day strike that damaged the company badly and depleted the savings of most workers.

When in 1986 and again in 1988 the UAW signed contracts with Caterpillar without striking, it was breaking precedent, but it was not doing so without paying a price. In these two contracts the union got wage increases and job guarantees, and in conjunction with the company began a Japanese-style Employee Satisfaction Program (ESP) that stressed worker-management cooperation. But in exchange for labor peace, the union agreed to dramatic reductions in job classifications and conceded that it would not fight the tremendous job losses it had incurred at Caterpillar during the 1980s.

By 1991, when it began its current strike at Caterpillar, the UAW was in a much more vulnerable position than the company. It had a work force that had dropped by 24,000 since 1979 and locals that were a shadow of their former selves. Local 974 in East Peoria was down to 9,000 from a 1979 total of 24,000. Nearby Local 751 in Decatur was down to 2,000 from a 1979 total of 4,500. Making matters even more difficult was the trust Caterpillar had cultivated with its Employee Satisfaction Program. Workers had gone out of their way to institute money-saving procedures, and many believed that a new era had begun at Caterpillar.

Caterpillar, for its part, was able to use its period of peaceful co-existence with the UAW to strengthen itself. From 1987 through 1990 the company recorded enormous profits, topping the $600 million mark in 1988. In 1990, when its current CEO, Donald Fites, took over the direction of Caterpillar, the company was confident it was in a position to put pressure on the union for new concessions. Even before he took command of Caterpillar, the 58-year-old Fites, who has worked for the company since 1956, was pushing for a leaner operation. As a company vice president, he masterminded a reorganization plan designed to give individual Caterpillar units more autonomy, and on taking command of Caterpillar, he quickly made its unionized work force his primary target for change.

Although Fites admitted before a Congressional committee that production workers are just 6.1 percent of Caterpillar's expenses, he was determined to reduce their cost still further. "A company like Caterpillar, which has not given up an inch of market share, has to put some limits on how fast incomes can grow to stay competitive," Fites told the *New York Times* last November. For Fites, this meant that Caterpillar would no longer engage in pattern bargaining with the UAW. Citing Caterpillar's global position—second in net exports to the Boeing Company—and its rivalry with Japan's giant earth-moving equipment maker Komatsu, Fites insisted that the time had come for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caterpillar to get a different deal from the one that linked its labor contracts to American rivals John Deere, Cummins Engine, and Detroit Diesel.

In challenging the union but offering its veteran work force six years of guaranteed employment plus wages that will average nearly $19 an hour by 1994, Fites was gambling. He was appealing to the self-interest of a work force that averages forty-four years of age and twenty-two and one half years on the job. Caterpillar workers can retire with full benefits and a one-time $4,000 bonus after thirty years, and more than sixty percent of Caterpillar's current workers will be eligible to do so within the next six years. Most of them will not directly feel the penalties of Caterpillar's proposed contract while on the job.

As contact expiration drew closer, Fites was not, however, content to rely on Caterpillar's work force to make an agreement so radically different from the one it had known in the past. In the months leading up to November, Caterpillar built up its inventories, and on November 3, when the UAW began a selective strike, pulling out 2,400 workers in East Peoria and Decatur, the company was in a position to retaliate. On November 7, it locked out 5,650 workers, setting in motion the forces that would eventually bring the total number of UAW strikers to 12,600. Then in April, after an intense media campaign run with the aid of the St. Louis public relations firm of Fleishman-Hillard, Caterpillar raised the stakes again, declaring that it would fire striking workers who did not return to their jobs. By the time the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service arrived on the scene and arranged for a cooling off period, an estimated 47,000 calls had come into Caterpillar offices in response to the job openings it had advertised.

For the UAW the threat to replace its work force came as a shock. "Most of our people didn't believe the company would try to replace its workers," Local 974 President Jerry Brown acknowledges. Although it had begun its battle with Caterpillar with an $820 million strike fund and could have gone on much longer (even with paying health benefits, $100 a week strike pay, and bonuses up to $2,000), the UAW decided not to risk further erosion of its position and the likelihood that an increasing number of its own workers would cross picket lines. The UAW ordered its striking workers to return to Caterpillar on April 14.

"They did all the right things that labor unions have done since 1945," New York labor lawyer Tom Kennedy would later observe of UAW's Caterpillar strategy. Kennedy is far from alone in believing that the UAW leadership mismanaged the Caterpillar strike, fighting the company with outdated tactics.

The UAW's critics find it hard to believe that a decade after Ronald Reagan broke the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike by bringing in permanent replacement workers, there should have been any doubt at UAW headquarters that Caterpillar would use similar tactics. Since PATCO, the copper company Phelps Dodge, Louisiana Pacific's lumber operations, Eastern Airlines, and Greyhound Bus Lines have all sought to win strikes by replacing their regular workers. The UAW's chief mistake, its critics argue, was going to a strike so early rather than as a last resort. Far better, they argue, to begin with an in-plant, work-to-rule strategy designed to slow production, and combine that with a corporate campaign that would pressure Caterpillar's investors and put the company on the defensive in the media.

Such criticism angers UAW officials, who talk about 20/20 hindsight. But the actions of UAW leaders, especially since sending their strikers back to work under the terms imposed by Caterpillar, suggest that in fact much of the criticism has been accurate.

The UAW is now training its rank and file to carry out an in-plant, work-to-rule campaign. The idea, as UAW staffer and former Local 974 President Jim O'Connor explains, is to have the membership understand that such an action is very different from a traditional slowdown or sabotage. Nobody is expected to risk his or her job by an illegal action or to refuse a proper order from a supervisor. The aim is rather to show that by doing everything by the book, "checking our brains at the plant gate," as O'Connor puts it, rank and file can naturally slow production. UAW members who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have fought work-to-rule campaigns have been brought in to conduct workshops, and the idea is to put entire plant units through work-to-rule training sessions as soon as possible.

Less clear is where the UAW is heading in terms of corporate and media campaigns against Caterpillar. On April 8, two days after Caterpillar's stated deadline for replacing striking workers, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Bill Casstevens made an appearance at Caterpillar's annual shareholders' meeting and set off an explosive question-and-answer period when he openly challenged the company's version of the contract it was offering its workers. During the spring the UAW also began responding more directly to Caterpillar's public relations campaign. The response was not enough to offset the fact, as Jerry Brown noted, that "Caterpillar kicked our ass in the media." But it was recognition that in a state like Illinois, with a 7.8 percent unemployment rate, Caterpillar's newspaper ads and television spots made it all too easy for unemployed workers to offer to cross UAW picket lines.

Can the UAW turn around a fight in which it has clearly lost the first round? Among the union's critics, there is hope mixed with fear. Jerry Tucker, the leader of the militant New Directions movement within the UAW and an unsuccessful candidate for the UAW presidency at its convention in June, is among those with fears. A believer in the in-plant campaign and an opponent of the kind of worker-management programs the UAW had with Caterpillar, Tucker sees the UAW's Detroit leadership as a millstone around the Caterpillar workers' necks. For Tucker, the UAW failure to gauge Caterpillar's willingness to replace its work force reflects how out of touch and unprepared it is to take on the battles labor will have to fight in the 1990s.

Ray Rogers, who brought the corporate campaign to national prominence in the 1970s in textile worker strikes against Farah Slacks and J. P. Stevens, is even more critical of UAW leadership. "If the United Auto Workers understood what a corporate campaign is, they wouldn't find themselves in the predicament they face at Caterpillar," Rogers insists. He points to Casstevens's appearance at the Caterpillar shareholders' convention as having little connection to a thought-out corporate campaign that would target banks and other institutional investors in Caterpillar, putting pressure on them to get Caterpillar to settle its strike on very different terms from the ones it is now offering. For Rogers, the UAW's multi-million dollar war chest and 12,600 striking workers were an enormous resource that could have been used to build public support not only in areas where Caterpillar has plants but across the country.

"The Caterpillar fight can be won, but it will take a whole different direction from the one in which the UAW has gone," Rogers argues. The coming months promise to answer how quickly the UAW can move in that different direction. There is little doubt that it has the resources to carry on the marathon battle it now seems in for, and despite its unsuccessful November to April strike effort, the union has some advantages it didn't have then. Caterpillar's inventories are now down, and last year it ran a $404 million deficit. The last thing the company needs is a work-to-rule campaign that hurts production. Returning strikers found chaos on the shop floor in plant after plant, and since then, there have been newspaper reports of management-built Caterpillar equipment costing dealers dozens of hours of repair (in one highly publicized case, ninety-two hours of work on eight $700,000 dump trucks).

Even more important, the Caterpillar work force, which took a terrific financial battering while plants were shut down, is anything but a beaten rank and file. Peoria is a perfect case in point. There is no doubt that Peoria is a company town. "Caterpillar Shapes the World" signs line the backs of bus benches, and in downtown Peoria Caterpillar's gleaming, modern headquarters dominates Courthouse Plaza and its Civil War memorial. It is clear that as Caterpillar goes so goes the economy of Peoria. But in a town where Caterpillar's influence is overwhelming, you don't find intimidated workers.

UAW Local 974 stands at the edge of East Peoria on a road that borders a cornfield. In front of the union hall flies the American flag and, below it, a second flag with the silhouette

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of an imprisoned soldier and the words, "POW-MIA, You are not forgotten." This is a union where tradition and loyalty matter. Its members believe they have taken the worst of what Caterpillar has to give, and they don't fear what comes next. The Employee Satisfaction Program, designed to bring the union and the company together, is now looked at very differently from the way it was earlier. As eighteen-year Caterpillar veteran John Backus notes, "It was a bunch of crap. Just a way to get us to feel better." Even those who have the most to gain from an early agreement with Caterpillar aren't backing down. Roger Suddith, a lathe operator at Caterpillar for twenty six and a half years, is someone the company has singled out, firing him for "strike-related misbehavior" after he called another worker a "scab" during an argument in a local bar. Suddith makes no apologies for the bar incident. Instead, he has gotten a lawyer and has taken his case to the National Labor Relations Board, convinced that what Caterpillar is really trying to do is intimidate workers like him, who now find themselves back at their old jobs alongside those who in April crossed picked lines.

With locals like 974, it is difficult to imagine the UAW not going all out in its strike against Caterpillar. What is at stake for the UAW is, however, more than just the lives of its Caterpillar workers, who represent less than 2 percent of its membership. Although UAW officials are reluctant to draw parallels between the Caterpillar strike and next year's contract negotiations with the Big Three auto makers—UAW President Owen Bieber insists it is like "comparing apples to russet potatoes"—the linkage is going to be made on both sides.

With the auto makers, which employ 400,000 UAW members, the union has the benefit of letters of agreement barring the use of replacement workers. But the union also has some severe problems. In contrast to Caterpillar, which even when its plants were shut managed to hold on to its 30 percent share of worldwide construction equipment sales, the Detroit auto makers have been steadily losing business to Japan. If the UAW cannot impose pattern bargaining—or win the crucial battle for public opinion—against a company like Caterpillar, what is it going to do against General Motors, with its declining sales and 74,000 scheduled layoffs? It is hard to imagine both auto executives and UAW rank and file, all too aware that since 1979 UAW membership has dropped from 1.5 million to 900,000, not taking notice and being influenced in how they fight. □

To Our Contributors:

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript—the mails aren't always reliable. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. No dot matrix submissions, *please*.

(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

(6) Please bear with us—we have accumulated quite a backlog of material, and you may have to wait for a few issues before you see your article in print.

THE EDITORS □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Murray Hausknecht

ON POLITICS AND TRUST

A Growing Problem of Modern Life

What kind of candidate might [Jesse Jackson] be . . . I found it hard, in the light of his record and stated opinions, to think of him as a man I wanted to be president. Now, this isn't the sort of question that has been at the forefront of thinking among people on the left; but perhaps it should have been. We should by now have learned from hard experience that the quality and credibility of leaders is a crucial factor in politics. It is especially crucial in the American political system, where enormous power resides in the hands of the president. The Jackson program seemed attractive, the Jackson movement vigorous, but I felt uneasy about Jackson the leader. I could not give him the sort of trust that one should feel about the person one wants to have as president.

Irving Howe, "A Mixed Response,"
Dissent, *Summer 1988, 264–67*

I heard ads for one judge bad-mouthing the other. Then, a little later, the other gets on with his spiel, knocking the first guy. I don't know who to trust. I have to judge who comes across the best on radio or television. And I don't know enough to figure out what is the truth. I kind of throw my hands up in the air and say there's no hope.

Housepainter, Rhinebeck, New York, in Robin Toner, "Turned off by Campaigns, or Just Too Busy to Vote"?
New York Times, *November 6, 1990*

These two rather different voters seem to be voicing a question every voter answers at some level of thought or intuition: Whom can I trust? In the past this was mostly an implicit question that assumed that a satisfactory answer could be found. But here the question becomes explicit, perhaps because finding an answer may be more difficult than it used to be. Nor are these idiosyncratic responses; trust has become a major problem for American voters.

If the question of trust is experienced in a new way, there are different paths to an answer. The housepainter takes his need to trust a candidate as a given; *whom* to trust is his problem. For Irving Howe there is an unstated question of whether the trustworthiness of a candidate is politically relevant. Only after he satisfies himself on this score does he turn to Jackson's political record to explain his lack of trust in him. The housepainter, who "doesn't know enough to figure out the truth" of the candidates' charges, cannot use this "rational" approach. He depends uneasily on TV to help solve his problem. This reliance is not unique: the *New York Times* reported that one 1990 pre-election poll found that 23 percent of the respondents said that television ads influenced their decisions about candidates, and pundits who comb through poll results agreed that this is "just the tip of the iceberg."

Howe's response to his first problem raises its own questions. Why have people on the left, priding themselves on being informed, taken so long to see "that the quality and credibility of leaders is a crucial factor in politics," and this only after "hard experience"? Howe's reflections do not provide us with much more than a common-sense rationale for worrying about "the quality and credibility" of candidates. For there are more fundamental reasons than the power of the American presidency for thinking that trust is politically relevant.

In an election citizens delegate their power to others. How much power is delegated to leaders can vary in democracies, but elected representatives always have some degree of autonomy. One

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

view of this autonomy, deriving from John Locke, among others, emphasizes the role of human agency in government. In a recent commentary, John Dunn says Locke believed that

> [s]ince any state as its subjects actually encounter it . . . behaves as it does merely because a particular set of human beings choose one course of action rather than another, the most important single point about a state's claim to authority always remains that they are claims of particular individuals to be obeyed. In political agency what there is in the end for human beings to reckon with is only their judgement of how other human beings can be expected to act.[1]

Because it is impossible to be certain about how others will act, trust inevitably enters into any choice among candidates.

Taken to its extreme, this view totally ignores the influence of a society's social structure and institutions, the core idea of traditional Marxism. Here the problems associated with "democracy as a system of representative government" are at best pseudoproblems. At the heart of Marxism is the view that political behavior is determined by impersonal social and economic forces; in a bourgeois democracy the actions of politicians are, by definition, merely manifestations of those forces at a given historical moment. Thus, what matters is not *who* a candidate is but the class interests served. A choice among candidates of bourgeois parties, in the absence of a socialist party, is a tactical decision about which party will best serve the workers' class interests.

Marxism, like Freudian theory at a later date, tells us that appearances are deceptive, and both promise to reveal the invisible forces controlling human actions. Even when not carried to an extreme, the Marxist perspective paid little or no attention to the fact that policies are carried out by human agents. This fact has been insufficiently appreciated by Marxist politics, and *that* is one of the lessons of "hard experience."

But it was Marx himself who asserted that "human beings make their own history but not always under conditions of their own choosing." If the first part of that principle is taken seriously, then the interaction of politicians and citizens cannot be ignored in political theory and practice, and trust becomes a politically relevant problem.[2]

Aside from the influence of Marxism, there is another reason why the left has ignored the question of trust. Here one of Howe's comments serves as a clue. He writes that, while asking what kind of president Jackson would make was not at the "forefront" of leftist thinking, it was "very often at the center of conduct." In socialist groups "what often held members was the trust they could feel in the integrity, honesty, selflessness of leaders with whom they might on occasion disagree or even take to be inadequate. . . ." He cites Norman Thomas and Michael Harrington as examples of such leaders. In practice ("conduct"), trust was important in a socialist group, although it seldom became part of its conscious thought. Why this should have been so is related to the nature of trust and how it comes about "naturally."

Trust, to follow Anthony Giddens, is "confidence in the reliability of a person" with respect to some event or anticipated result of action because we attribute probity or love to the person. We may also have confidence in the reliability of "abstract systems" of technical knowledge as, for example, when we board a plane and trust that the aeronautical science acquired by engineers allows them to build safe airplanes. It is not the engineers or the crew we trust, since we know nothing about them; we trust their acquired knowledge and skills. Trust, whether in specific persons or abstract systems, helps us deal with uncertainty and is a factor in the calculations of risk.

Ordinarily, trust in persons is an organic development of social relationships. As a result of continuous, face-to-face interaction among people each acquires knowledge of the others and each may develop affection for the others—they become friends. To say that persons are friends is to say that they trust one another. Trust of this kind—Bernard Williams calls it "thick trust"—is taken for granted in friendship and family networks. "Thick trust" is maintained by continuing personal relationships. Those about whom we know little or nothing are strangers and cannot be trusted.

The socialist groups Howe has in mind never were mass organizations, and the distance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between members and their leaders was, relatively speaking, not very great. In these circumstances it was easy, again relatively speaking, to gain some sense of the leader as a person and to develop a sense of trust in the same way, although somewhat more thinly, than trust develops in friendship. Here, as in friendship, the question, "Can I trust him or her?" never comes into consciousness.

What was true of socialist groups was also true of many political communities. Politics in many small towns of nineteenth-century America was embedded in the particularities of place and face-to-face interaction. Those who ran for office were part of a network of friends, neighbors, and kin, and so it was relatively easy to maintain a sense of personal linkage to office holders. Candidates for state and federal office brought their campaigns into local communities shepherded by local notables, and listening to stump speeches was part of the "leisure time" activities of rural America—politics was still woven into the fabric of everyday life.

This fabled America gave way in the latter part of the century to a more urbanized society in which parties dominated politics, with local political elites or party machines controlling towns and cities. Parties, however, were to a significant extent still locally embedded. According to Paul Kleppner, writing about late nineteenth-century voting patterns, "the linkage between ethnoreligious subcultures and party identification was immensely significant. . . . Primary group involvements—those with family and friends—strongly reinforced partisan identification."[3] When it was necessary to have some contact with the wider world, aid was sought at the local party clubhouse. Local aldermen regularly appeared at the clubhouse, greeted constituents by name, and participated in a network of reciprocity in which all implicitly understood that a "favor" now was returned later at election time. In elections for more distant offices it was less likely that one knew the party candidate "personally," but he was favored because the party was part of a local network whose members were bound by "thick trust." The party with which one identified was not some abstract, detached entity; it was part of everyday life, and its endorsement seemed a credible reason for trusting a candidate.

To the extent that the political party was locally embedded, trust was less likely to be problematic. It is emphatically *not* that earlier in the century politicians were trusted and now they are distrusted, or that the domination of the political machines represents a lost Golden Age of urban politics. Rather, it is that today cumulative social change makes the problem of whom one can trust a less easily answered question than it was in the past.

The Great Depression along with World War II speeded changes that detached politics from a close connection with local life. The growth of welfare-state programs begun by the New Deal increased the importance of impersonal bureaucracies that reached into the daily life of localities—the local clubhouse became less important as an intermediary in dealings with the larger political world. Population movements set in motion by the depression and accelerated by World War II hastened the decline of the machine and weakened the hold of political parties. The decline of rural areas is partly responsible for the demise of the "Solid South," a historic base of the Democratic party. Following the war, there was also the movement from the central city to its suburbs. To the extent that the machine was rooted in traditional neighborhoods ("urban villages"), the growth of the suburbs and the influx of new migrants to the city eliminated that base.

Such changes mean that the political experience has been severed from daily life; it is difficult to maintain any sense of "personal" connection to those whom we elect to represent us. Where formerly a common party identification was sufficient to provide grounds for "natural" trust, now party endorsement is less meaningful in providing a connection between voter and candidate. To put it another way, in the sphere of politics, as with other institutions, we must believe that "the system works," since—like those unknown engineers and flight crews—our elected officials are strangers with whom we share few circumstances that would nurture a "natural" trust.

With the decreasing ability of a party to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

consistently deliver constituencies on election day, candidates become independent entrepreneurs. This means that candidates maintain only minimal links with their parties—they are, so to speak, in business for themselves. Highly professional in the use of campaign skills, they are able to raise money on their own. Once elected they become more independent of the party. The political campaign becomes focused less on the candidate as an advocate of a party's programs than on the character of the candidate as a person. The blurring of party identification and the "personalization" of politics is illustrated by Ronald Reagan and his assertion that Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman were his political models. This kind of entrepreneurship exacerbates the problems of trust.[4]

The problem now is not unlike the one we face in choosing a doctor when family doctors are an extinct species. Although we are confident that "modern medicine" can help us, it can only do so through a physician, and it is this specific person we must trust. Similarly, "the system" is still composed of people, a fact brought home to us when we must choose among candidates. Most people do not have the information needed for assessing trustworthiness. Only an infinitesimal part of the electorate maintains a continuing interest in politics or is motivated enough to track down, as Howe did, a candidate's record. For the rest, an election is a choice among strangers that is harder than making a choice of a doctor, since in the latter case one can ask others for information acquired from their experiences. Now, with the decline of the party as a guarantor of trust, all voters are equally ignorant about the trustworthiness of candidates.

Their ignorance is an even greater burden because campaigns built around personal attacks—"negative advertising"—are encouraged by the loss of linkage between politics and everyday life. The stock-in-trade of candidates as political entrepreneurs is not primarily advocacy of party programs but their ability to provide "services" for their constituents and their attractiveness as persons. By assailing one another's virtue, candidates enhance their claims to be persons of "good character."

At this point television enters. Its peculiar power becomes apparent when we recall how we make up our minds about strangers. In the case of professionals we judge largely on what Giddens labels "demeanor": "The grave deliberations of the judge, solemn professionalism of the doctor . . . all fall into this category." Thus the housepainter's upset with candidates for a judicial office who "bad-mouth" one another; they contradict his expectations about how judges ought to act. Thus, too, the success of Ronald Reagan, a good second-rate actor whose familiar face fostered the illusion that he was someone we knew and could trust.

Most such assessments are made intuitively, based on unexamined beliefs governing expectations of what is appropriate. Television, with its visual clues—that is, "body language" as a guide to "sincerity"—makes it easy to bring this tacit knowledge to bear in situations where face-to-face interaction is impossible. And so the housepainter, like millions of others, turns to it for help about whom to trust.

Yet the recourse to TV is an uneasy one. Americans are not an unknowing audience; like many others the housepainter has probably grown up with TV, and has been told repeatedly, often by those appearing on TV shows, that the images he sees are designed to influence him. The "information" presented is tainted. But knowing this is not sufficient; the trick is to know it and still divine who is worthy of trust. His cry that he does "not know enough" may be understood as a statement of a felt inability to decode the clues. His despair—"I kind of throw up my hands"—is the result of

NEW

National Health Insurance

Telling the Good from the Bad

by Rashi Fein

Reprinted from *Dissent*, Spring 1992 by The Michael Harrington Center. Send $1 for s&h to the Center at Queens College, Flushing, NY 11367

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

losing hope that he can exercise some control over the people who influence so much of his life.

When the housepainter throws his hands up and says there is no hope, he is expressing a profound sense of insecurity; not knowing whom to trust makes one prey to a deep-seated anxiety. But it is not so much not knowing whom to trust that is at the root of the anxiety as it is of losing confidence in one's ability to make such judgments. People experiencing this bind cope with their anxiety by joining the housepainter in turning their attention away from politics altogether.

Here a paradox becomes apparent. The disengagement of politics from the everyday life of persons and communities lessens their control over their representatives. The consequent enlargement of the latter's autonomy underscores the need for leaders who can be trusted; but the same disengagement of politics increases the difficulties of deciding who can be trusted. More specifically, the present historical moment—after Watergate, the Iran-contra affair, George Bush's scandalous presidential campaign and unconscionable behavior toward the Kurdish and Shiite rebels during the Gulf War—when the need for honorable people in high office is inescapably apparent, this time is the same historical moment when social and cultural conditions undermine our confidence that the people we elect can be trusted. It is no wonder, then, that large numbers of us throw up our hands in despair and retreat from the anxiety-producing burdens of political participation into the search for the promised pleasures of private life.

There can be no easy escape, however, especially in an election year when politics becomes difficult to avoid. In these circumstances it is necessary to recognize that the question, Whom to trust? is as politically relevant as the analysis of political ideologies and party platforms. For as recent history has reminded us, the character of leaders is not a secondary consideration when making decisions that influence our political fate. □

Notes

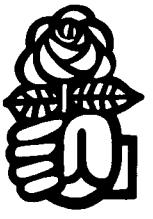
[1] "Trust and Political Agency," in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 84f.

[2] Marx's aphorism is one of the starting points of the theoretical work of the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, whose analysis of trust in his recent book *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990) informs this essay. I am also indebted to the comments of Nathan Joseph.

[3] Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted?* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 46.

[4] Political entrepreneurship and the decline of the importance of the political party in election campaigns is detailed in Alan Ehrenhalt, *The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power, and the Pursuit of Office* (New York: Times Books, 1991).

Democratic Socialists of America



Join us!

Members of the Democratic Socialists of America work in immediate struggles for justice -- as we build a movement for long-term social change. We bring to our work a strategy for building alliances among social movements and a vision of a more just and equitable society.

❑ Yes, I want to join DSA! Enclosed are my dues:
❑ $50 sustaining ❑ $35 regular ❑ $15 low-income
(Includes a subscription to *Democratic Left*.)
❑ Sign me up for the following DSA commission(s):
❑ African American Commission ($10)
❑ Anti-Racism Commission ($10)
❑ Send me more information about DSA.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

Make check payable to DSA, 15 Dutch Street, #500, New York, NY 10038. (212) 962-0390

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Herbert J. Gans

THE WAR AGAINST THE POOR

Instead of Programs to End Poverty

While liberals have been talking about resuming the War on Poverty, elected officials are doing something very different: waging a war on the poor. Even the riot that took place in Los Angeles in early May did not interrupt that war, perhaps because the riot was a mixture of protest, looting, and destruction.

The war on the poor was initiated by dramatic shifts in the domestic and world economy which have turned more and more unskilled and semiskilled workers into surplus labor. Private enterprise participated actively by shipping jobs overseas and by treating workers as expendable. Government has done its part as well, increasingly restricting the welfare state safety net to the middle class. Effective job-creation schemes, housing programs, educational and social services that serve the poor—and some of the working classes—are vanishing. Once people become poor, it becomes ever harder for them to escape poverty.

Despite the willingness to help the poor expressed in public opinion polls, other, more covert, attitudes have created a political climate that makes the war on the poor possible. Politicians compete with each other over who can capture the most headlines with new ways to punish the poor. However, too many of their constituents see the poor not as people without jobs but as miscreants who behave badly because they do not abide by middle class or mainstream moral values. Those judged "guilty" are dismissed as the "undeserving poor"—or the underclass in today's language—people who do not deserve to escape poverty.

True, *some* poor people are indeed guilty of immoral behavior—that is, murderers, street criminals, drug sellers, child abusers.

Then there are poor people whose anger at their condition expresses itself in the kind of nihilism that cannot be defined as political protest. Even so, most of those labeled "undeserving" are simply poor people who for a variety of reasons cannot live up to mainstream behavioral standards, like remaining childless in adolescence, finding and holding a job, and staying off welfare. This does not make them immoral. Because poor adolescents do not have jobs does not mean they are lazy. Because their ghetto "cool" may deter employers does not mean they are unwilling to work. Still, the concept of an underclass lumps them with those who are criminal or violent.

Why do Americans accept so many untruths about the poor, and remain unwilling to accept the truth when it is available? The obvious answer is that some of the poor frighten or anger those who are better-off. But they also serve as a lightning rod—scapegoats—for some problems among the better-off. Street criminals rightly evoke fears about personal safety, but they, and the decidedly innocent poor also generate widespread anger about the failure of government to reduce "urban" and other problems.

Among whites, the anger is intertwined with fears about blacks and "Hispanics," or the newest immigrants, reflecting the fear of the stranger and newcomer from which their own ancestors suffered when they arrived here. (Few remember that, at the start of the twentieth cen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tury, the "Hebrews" then arriving were sometimes described as a "criminal race"—as the Irish had been earlier in the nineteenth century.)

The hostility toward today's welfare recipients is a subtler but equally revealing index to the fears of the more fortunate. This fear reflects a historic belief that people who are not economically self-sufficient can hurt the economy, although actual expenditures for welfare have always been small. Welfare recipients are also assumed to be getting something for nothing, often by people who are not overly upset about corrupt governmental or corporate officials who get a great deal of money for nothing or very little.

Welfare recipients possibly provoke anger among those concerned about their own economic security, especially in a declining economy. Welfare recipients are seen as living the easy life while everyone else is working harder than ever—and thus become easy scapegoats, which does not happen to the successful, who often live easier lives.

The concern with poor unmarried mothers, especially adolescents, whose number and family size have in fact long been declining, epitomizes adult fears about the high levels of sexual activity and the constant possibility of pregnancy among *all* adolescent girls. In addition, the notion of the "undeserving poor" has become a symbol for the general decline of mainstream moral standards, especially those celebrated as "traditional" in American society.

Ironically, however, the "undeserving poor" can be forced to uphold some of these very standards in exchange for welfare, much as some Skid Row homeless still get a night's dinner and housing in exchange for sitting through a religious service. The missionaries in this case are secular: social workers and bureaucrats. But the basic moralistic expectations remain the same, including the demand that the poor live up to values that their socioeconomic superiors preach but do not always practice. Thus, social workers can have live-in lovers without being married, but their clients on welfare cannot. Members of the more fortunate classes are generally free from moral judgments altogether; no one talks about an undeserving middle class or the undeserving rich.

The war on the poor is probably best ended by job-centered economic growth that creates decent public and private jobs. Once poor people have such jobs, they are almost automatically considered deserving, eligible for a variety of other programs to help them or their children escape poverty.

The most constructive way to supply such jobs would be an updated New Deal that repairs failing infrastructures, creates new public facilities (including new data bases), and allows the old ones to function better—for example, by drastically reducing class size in public schools. Equally important are ways of reviving private enterprise and finding new niches for it in the global economy. Without them, there will not be enough well-paying jobs in factories, laboratories, and offices—or taxes to pay for public programs. Such programs are already being proposed these days, by Bill Clinton and in the Congress, but mainly for working-class people who have been made jobless and are now joining the welfare rolls.

Last but not least is a new approach to income grants for those who cannot work or find work. The latest fashion is to put welfare recipients to work, which would be a good idea if even decent entry-level jobs for them could be found or created. (Alas, when taxpayers discover how much cheaper it is to pay welfare than to create jobs, that remedy may end as it has before.)

Also needed is a non-punitive, universal income grant program, which goes to all people who still end up as part of the labor surplus. If such a program copied the European principle of not letting the incomes of the poor fall below 60 to 70 percent of the median income—in the United States, welfare recipients get a fifth of the median on average—the recipients would remain integral members of society, who could be required to make sure their children would not become poor. (Such a solution would also cut down the crime rate.)

However, even minimal conventional anti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poverty programs are politically unpopular at the moment. The 1992 Democratic presidential candidates paid little attention to the poor during the primaries, except, in passing, in New York City and, then again, after Los Angeles. The future of antipoverty programs looks no brighter than before.

The time may be ripe to look more closely at how nonpoor Americans feel about poverty, and try to reduce their unwarranted fear and anger toward the poor—with the hope that they would then be more positive about reviving antipoverty efforts.

The first priority for reducing that anger is effective policies against drugs and street crime, though they alone cannot stem all the negative feelings. Probably the only truly effective solution is a prosperous economy in which the anger between all groups is lessened; and a more egalitarian society, in which the displacement of such anger on the poor is no longer necessary, and the remaining class conflicts can be fought fairly.

This ideal is today more utopian than ever, but it ought to be kept in mind. Every step toward it will help a little. Meanwhile, in order to bring back antipoverty programs, liberals, along with the poor and others who speak for the poor, could also try something else: initiating an intellectual and cultural defense of the poor. In a "sound bite": to fight *class* bigotry along with the racial kind.

Anti-bigotry programs work slowly and not always effectively, but they are as American as apple pie. Class bigotry is itself still a novel idea, but nothing would be lost by mounting a defense of the poor and putting it on the public agenda. Ten such defenses strike me as especially urgent:

1. *Poverty is not equivalent to moral failure*. That moral undesirables exist among the poor cannot be denied, but there is no evidence that their proportion is greater than among the more fortunate. "Bums" can be found at all economic levels. However, more prosperous miscreants tend to be less visible; the alcoholic co-worker can doze off at his desk, but the poor drunk is apt to be found in the gutter. Abusive middle class parents may remain invisible for years, until their children are badly hurt, but violent poor parents soon draw the attention of child-welfare workers and may lose their children to foster care.

Troubled middle-class people have access to experts who can demonstrate that moral diagnoses are not enough. The abusive mother was herself abused; the school dropout has a learning disability; the young person who will not work suffers from depression. Poor people, on the other hand, rarely have access to such experts or to clinical treatment. For the poor, the explanations are usually moral, and the treatment is punitive.

2. *"Undeservingness" is an effect of poverty*. Whatever else can be said about unmarried mothers on welfare, school dropouts, and people unwilling to take minimum-wage dead-end jobs, their behavior is almost always *poverty-related*.

This is, of course, also true of many street criminals and drug sellers. Middle-class people, after all, do not turn into muggers and street drug dealers any more than they become fifteen-year-old unmarried mothers.

People who have not been poor themselves do not understand how much of what the poor do is poverty-related. Poor young women often do not want to marry the fathers of their children because such men cannot perform as breadwinners and might cope with their economic failures by battering their wives. Although a great deal of publicity is given to school dropouts, not enough has been said about the peer pressure in poor, and even working-class, neighborhoods that discourages doing well in school.

3. *The responsibilities of the poor*. Conservatives, often mute about the responsibilities of the rich, stress the responsibilities of the poor. However, poor people sometimes feel no need to be responsible to society until society treats them responsibly. Acting irresponsibly becomes an angry reaction to, even a form of power, over that society. Those whose irresponsibility is criminal deserve punishment and the clearly lazy deserve to lose their benefits. But who would punish an unmarried mother who goes on welfare to obtain medical benefits that a job cannot supply? Is she not acting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

responsibly toward her child? And how well can we judge anyone's responsibility without first knowing what choices, responsible and irresponsible, were actually open? Being poor often means having little choice to begin with.

4. *The drastic scarcity of work for the poor.* Many Americans, including too many economists, have long assumed that there are always more jobs than workers, that the properly eager can always find them, hence the jobless are at fault. This is, however, a myth—one of many Ronald Reagan liked to promote when he was president. The facts are just the opposite. Decent jobs that are open to the poor, especially to blacks, were the first to disappear when our deindustrialization began. This helps to explain why so many poor men have dropped out of the labor force, and are no longer even counted as jobless.

Incidentally, the myth that the unemployed are unwilling to work is never attached to the rising number of working- and middle-class jobless. But, then, they are not yet poor enough to be considered undeserving.

5. *Black troubles and misbehavior are caused more by poverty than by race.* Because the proportion of blacks who are criminals, school dropouts, heads of single-parent families, or unmarried mothers is higher than among whites, blacks increasingly have to face the outrageous indignity of being considered genetically or culturally undesirable. The plain fact is that the higher rates of nearly all social problems among blacks are the effects of being poor—including poverty brought about by discrimination. When poor whites are compared with poor blacks, those with social problems are not so different, although black proportions remain higher. Even this difference can be attributed to income disparity. Black poverty has been worse in all respects and by all indicators ever since blacks were brought here as slaves.

6. *Blacks should not be treated like recent immigrants.* Black jobseekers sometimes face the additional burden of being expected, both by employers and the general public, to compete for jobs with recently arrived immigrants. This expectation calls on people who have been in America for generations to accept the subminimum wages, long hours, poor working conditions, and employer intimidation that are the lot of many immigrants. Actually, employers prefer immigrants because they are more easily exploited or more deferential than native-born Americans. To make matters worse, blacks are then blamed for lacking an "immigrant work ethic."

7. *Debunking the metaphors of undeservingness.* Society's wordsmiths—academics, journalists, and pundits—like to find, and their audiences like to hear, buzzwords that caricature moral failings among the poor; but it should not be forgotten that these terms were invented by the fortunate. *Not only is there no identifiable underclass, but a class "under" society is a social impossibility.* Welfare "dependents" are in that condition mainly because the economy has declared them surplus labor, and because they must rely on politicians and officials who determine their welfare eligibility.

Such metaphors are never applied to the more affluent. There are no hard-core millionaires, and troubled middle-class people will never be labeled an under-middle class. Women who choose to be financially dependent on their husbands are not described as spouse-dependent, while professors who rely on university trustees for their income are not called tenure-dependent.

8. *The dangers of class stereotypes.* Underclass and other terms for the undeserving poor are class stereotypes, which reinforce class discrimination much as racial stereotypes support racial discrimination. The many similarities between class and racial stereotypes still need to be identified.

Stereotypes sometimes turn into everyday labels that are so taken for granted that they turn into self-fulfilling prophecies—and then cause particular havoc among the more vulnerable poor. For example, boys from poor single-parent families are apt to be punished harder for minor delinquencies simply because of the stereotype that they are growing up without paternal or other male supervision. Once they, and other poor people, are labeled as undeserving, public officials who are supposed to supply them with services feel

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

justified in not being as helpful as before—though depriving poor people of an emergency rent payment or food grant may be enough to push them closer to homelessness or street crime.

The recent display of interest in and appeals for affirmative action along class lines—even by conservatives like Dinesh D'Souza—suggests that the time may be ripe to recognize, and begin to fight, the widespread existence of class discrimination and prejudice. The confrontation has to take place not only in everyday life but also in the country's major institutions, politics, and courts. The Constitution that is now interpreted as barring racial discrimination can perhaps be interpreted to bar class discrimination as well.

9. *Blaming the poor reduces neither poverty nor poverty-related behavior.* Labeling the poor as undeserving does not attack the causes of street crime, improve the schools of poor children, or reduce adult joblessness. Such labels are only a way of expressing anger toward the poor. Blaming the victim solves nothing except to make blamers feel better temporarily. Such labeling justifies political ideologies and interests that oppose solutions, and thus increases the likelihood that nothing will be done about poverty—or crime.

10. *Improving reporting and scholarship about the poor.* Most poverty news is about crime, not poverty. How many reporters ever ask whether economic hardship is part of the crime story? The government's monthly jobless rate is reported, but not the shortage of jobs open to the poor. Likewise, the percentage of people below the poverty rate is an annual news story, but the actual income of the poor, often less than half the poverty line, or about $6,000 a year, is not mentioned.

The "spins," both in government statistics and in journalism, carry over into scholarship. Millions were spent to find and measure an underclass, but there is little ethnographic research to discover why the poor must live as they do. Researchers on homelessness look at mental illness as a cause of homelessness; they do not study it as a possible *effect!*

There are also innumerable other studies of the homeless, but too few about the labor markets and employers, housing industry and landlords, and other factors that create homelessness in the first place.

The Americans who feel most threatened by the poor are people from the working class, whom journalists currently call the middle class. They are apt to live nearest the poor. They will suffer most, other than the poor themselves, from street crime, as well as from the fear that the poor could take over their neighborhoods and jobs. Indeed, as inexpensive housing and secure jobs requiring little education become more scarce, the people only slightly above the poor in income and economic security fear that their superior status will shrink drastically. Viewing the poor as undeserving helps to maintain and even widen that status gap.

No wonder, then, that in the current economic crisis, the journalists' middle class and its job problems are the big story, and the poor appear mainly as the underclass, with candidates ignoring poverty. The political climate being what it is, this may even be unavoidable. Indeed, if the winner's margin in the coming elections comes from that middle class, the candidate must initiate enough economic programs to put *its* jobless back to work and to solve its health care, housing, and other problems.

That winner should be bold enough to make room in the program for the poor as well. Poverty, racial polarization, crime, and related problems cannot be allowed to rise higher without further reducing morale, quality of life, and economic competitiveness. Otherwise, America will not be a decent, safe, or pleasant place to live, even for the affluent. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Michael Walzer

SCENARIOS FOR POSSIBLE LEFTS

Where Can We Go?

Let's begin an argument (here in the pages of *Dissent*) about the future of the left—an open, many-sided, tentative, experimental argument, without manifestos or ideologically correct positions. We are in a period of uncertainty and confusion. The collapse of communism ought to open new opportunities for the democratic left, but its immediate effect has been to raise questions about many leftist (not only communist) orthodoxies: about the "direction" of history, the role of state planning in the economy, the value and effectiveness of the market, the future of nationalism, and so on. I am not going to try to answer questions like these. It seems useful to bracket them and ask another: what might be the shape of a left within which answers could be worked out? What kind of left politics is possible now, appealing to what constituencies, organized how? What are our options?

I cannot offer much more than a list with commentary. Other *Dissent* editors and writers will, I hope, join in with lists of their own (mine is a little short) and with additional comments. Perhaps we can constitute one kind of left (a speculative and disputatious left) in the very process of arguing about the possible kinds.

1. *A sectarian left.* It may seem odd to start here, since sectarianism is more often a dead end than a useful beginning. But I have in mind a particular version of sectarianism, an academic version, which displays some robustness right now and is much in the news. The academic left has, of course, no such power as is attributed to it by neoconservative critics of "political correctness." Nor does it have, in my view, the prospects for growth and influence claimed by its participants. Still, it is a lively presence and something new in the history of left sectarianism: more like a "school" than a party, with masters and disciples (professors and graduate students) instead of leaders and militants, guided by a doctrine and a method rather than an ideology. The doctrine and method, however, bear the clear marks of sectarian closure. They are expressed in a difficult and esoteric language, and they demand a radical commitment. The language is mostly that of French poststructuralism, with significant Marxist residues; the commitment is mostly residual (it is hard to see how it could be justified in poststructuralist terms).

Perhaps this academic left can play the classic role of the sect, providing mechanisms for protective encapsulation, survival, recruitment, and conversion. The larger left (if there is a larger left) is often fed by people who pass through the sects, receiving a political education there and then breaking away or fading away but retaining a strong leftist identification. They often raise radical children—not an unimportant political function.

Will the current academic wars have any other politically significant consequences? Opening up the curriculum, enlarging the canon, teaching a more critical (deconstructive) style? Maybe. Given the size of the student population, the percentage of the age cohort that goes to college, academic leftists can claim a very large constituency. I am inclined to doubt, however, that they can reach this constituency in any effective way. Undergraduates are in fact remarkably resistant to political, as distinct from, say, technical or professional education. And the politics of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

academic left is anyway too difficult, too far removed from everyday concerns, for easy transmission. Its journals are intensely focused on a very small audience and filled with its internal quarrels—which are often fierce enough to attract attention were it not for the largely impenetrable jargon in which they are conducted. Academic sectarianism seems unlikely to serve the purposes of mass education. Its graduate student recruits might constitute a vanguard, but where is the main force?

2. *An old left.* This is the leftism we know best, connected to the industrial working class, the trade unions, ethnic and religious minorities—the "new deal" coalition or, in Europe, classic social democracy. No doubt, *any* left should be so connected, but these are social/political forces in trouble or in decline, and the connection now is necessarily defensive. The word "old" takes on its standard meaning here; I am not evoking a traditional politics but more specifically a politics without much effervescence, youthful high spirits, new ideas, or physical energy. What seems called for, in any case, is strategic retreat and regroupment, which require other qualities. Old leftism today is a politics of holding on—to the welfare system, the public sector, collective bargaining, the possibility of state intervention. Sectional interests come to the fore at a time like this, because the threats posed by aggressive corporate managers and an indifferent or hostile political elite are experienced with varying intensity and on different schedules by different groups. The old left seems less a unified coalition than a temporal series of people in trouble—or, better, less a movement than a fortress or a set of fortresses under siege.

The British Labour party provides a useful model of the resulting politics, and it is a sign of the declining social base of this politics that it can hardly command the support of more than one-third of the electorate. That is by no means a small number, but the sense that it is not expanding and is not going to expand has made for a very weak opposition to the larger projects of the political right—an opposition, again, more concerned with protecting individuals and groups than with transforming the environment they inhabit. The old left has largely surrendered the vision of social transformation.

3. *A "new social movements" left.* This has been much talked about but not yet realized in any significant way: a left that draws on the energies of feminism, environmentalism, and so on. (But is there anything more than these two? Many of the new social movements are right-wing mobilizations, like the anti-abortion struggle and other similar campaigns—for school prayer or against pornography—driven by religious fundamentalism.) Feminism and environmentalism are no doubt movements of great potential strength, and their natural affinity, one would think, is with the left. It isn't apparent, though, that feminists and environmentalists have much interest in the groups-in-trouble that make up the old left's social base. They are not prepared to march to the rescue of the besieged fortresses. Nor do they seem to have much interest in each other: each has a constituency that cuts across the lines the other draws.

The new social movements are not like the labor movement, on which, indeed, a powerful left politics was founded. What we mean when we call them "new" is that they are committed to their limited, partial, singular cause, without global or world-historical ambitions, unwilling to compromise for the sake of winning power, naturally contained within civil society (and subject to its fissiparous tendencies), suspicious of politics and the state. It is not enough to label them as "single-issue" movements. The Anti-Corn Law League was a single-issue movement, but it was also part of, an instrument of, the bourgeois class struggle. But none of the new social movements appear to be part of anything else; they are self-contained, sufficient unto themselves. This is what makes them attractive: they claim to be able to win significant victories without revolutionary transformation or any radical use of the state's coercive power. Though they each have their militants, they don't require a "totalizing" commitment; nor do they think it a virtue to have a position, and then a set of interconnected positions, on every political issue. They mix intensity with specificity, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

makes them difficult to recruit to a wider politics.

Largely contained, as I have said, within civil society, feminism has produced its own sectarian grouplets (often located in the academy), while environmentalists tend to drift off into a kind of green mysticism. Perhaps a left party, movement, or political tendency could take over the programs of these two without taking in their organizations—a coalition of causes, as it were, rather than of groups. I can't imagine a left without these causes, though they would obviously have to be brought into contact with one another, and with others as well, including the causes-in-decline of the old left, and compromised in the process. It is not certain that many of their militants will stick around once the compromises begin. Still, there is hope here of finding and engaging new people, and the process of inclusion, if it works at all, should make life on the left more interesting. But what will this larger left look like?

4. *A communitarian left.* I am not sure what this means—presumably a left that has abandoned (or been liberated from) its old sectional base, its class/interest-group constituencies, and appeals instead to the nation as a whole in the name of traditional values and a common good. The idea is not entirely alien to the old left: think, for example, of Gramsci's call for a "national-popular" politics. Nor is any radical abandonment of old constituencies called for (it's not, in any case, morally possible) but rather a disciplining of all the "special interests"—starting on the left, in order to make communitarianism politically plausible, but proceeding rapidly to the right, where the special interests are much more "special." The first stage would involve persuading unionized workers to give up the more narrow forms of business unionism (feather-bedding, opposition to technological advance), black leaders to acknowledge and address the problems in their own communities, welfare recipients to take a greater responsibility for their own welfare, environmental activists to reject "not in my backyard" environmentalism, feminists to recognize the value of the family as a social institution and pull back from the radical individualism of "my body and my rights."

This sounds all too much like the agenda of the right—unless it is specifically designed to facilitate similar demands on the middle and upper classes, the political elites, and the corporate managers: to pay the taxes necessary for social reconstruction, to use the state as an instrument of the common good, to surrender the extraordinary privileges that have made this country one of the most inegalitarian of Western societies. These latter demands represent second-stage communitarianism. If it is serious, it is certainly a left politics, and there is no reason why such a politics can't be defended in the language of an American (liberal, democratic, egalitarian) political tradition. But this is also, after a decade or more of self-indulgence in the upper reaches of American society, a politics of sacrifice—and the sacrifices won't begin, as I have already suggested, in the upper reaches. The people first asked to turn away from the defense of private interests—"I'll get mine"—are people who have little to defend and are likely to get less. So communitarianism is not an easy (even if one could make the case that it is a necessary) politics for the left.

5. *A postmodern left.* This would permit (or actively encourage) an incoherent *bricolage* of all the other options. I am inclined to think that a little-of-this-and-a-little-of-that is the most likely leftist politics, at least in the short run. But we can hardly endorse this politics; it will be the unplanned product of many people pulling in different directions. In what direction do we want to pull? What story do we want to tell about ourselves? (It doesn't have to be a meta-narrative—here we are all postmodern—but it does require coherence and direction.) What moral and strategic choices should we make?

We can't cut our ties to people in trouble or to social groups in decline, for these are not merely the "base" of the old left but the *raison d'être* of any possible left. They can no longer be conceived, however, as a class apart, waiting for their historical moment. We must defend them, and help them defend themselves, as citizens of this society, not as the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

generative force of some ideal future. In this sense, we can best think of ourselves as democratic communitarians—though we are likely to emphasize, as most communitarians do not, that the economy is a central focus of communal life, much in need of democratization. We will remain uneasy with the market, even while recognizing its value, and we will look for ways of ensuring that the engaged citizen counteracts and balances the "economic man." And, finally, we will look for ways of strengthening civil society, because no democratic community can survive for long unless its citizens are locally active in associations, unions, movements, co-ops, churches, neighborhoods, and so on. Indeed, civil society has always been the home of the democratic left—since we never managed to "seize" state power—and I am inclined to think that we should dig in there. Gramsci's national-popular politics requires this qualification: that it must be enacted simultaneously in many local settings and in the singular national setting. Hence, number 6, *a democratic and pluralist left,* is probably the best of the possible lefts. But we must find more to say about what this means and how it might be realized. □

dissent

Major Sales Outlets for Our Magazine in New York City:

ALHUMRE INC.
1605 2nd Ave. (83rd & 84th Sts.)

BARNES & NOBLE, ANNEX
126 5th Ave. (18th St.)

B. DALTON
109 E. 42nd St.
666 5th Ave. (52nd St.)

BOOKS & CO.
939 Madison Ave. (75th St.)

COLISEUM BOOKS
1771 Broadway (57th St.)

EASTERN NEWSSTANDS:
30 Rockefeller Plaza
750 Third Ave.
350 Fifth Ave.
200 Park Ave.
540 Madison Ave.
World Trade Center

EASTSIDE BOOKSTORE
11 St. Mark's Place

EMPIRE CANDY
2635 Broadway (100th St.)

GOTTFRIED BROS
600 Madison Ave.

HUDSON NEWS
753 Broadway

HYDE PARK STATIONERS
992 Madison Ave. (77th St.)

JONIL
245 3rd Ave.

LIBRARIE LIPTON
850 Lexington Ave.

LINA MAGAZINES
Park Ave. So.
(21st & 22nd Sts.)

LOBBY OF THE
PAN AM BUILDING
200 Park Ave.

MAGAZINE MECCA
Broadway between 71st
and 72nd Sts.

THE MAGAZINE STORE
Broadway bet. 62nd & 63rd St.

NIKOS
462 6th Ave. (11th St.)

NIVA TRADING INC.
405 6th Ave.

PAPER HOUSE, INC.
18-A Lexington Ave.
(22nd & 23rd Sts.)

PAPYRUS
2915 Broadway (114th St.)

PARKSIDE STATIONERY
120 East 34th St. (Lexington Ave.)

PARSLEY SAGE, INC.
73 7th Ave. S. (Barrow)

PERIODIC NEWS
405 6th Ave.

REVOLUTION BOOKS
13 East 16th St.

RIZZOLI
Winter Garden
Battery Park City

RIZZOLI
31 W. 55th St.

RUTKIN NEWSSTAND
42nd St. (Between 5th & 6th Aves.)

72ND ST. STATIONERY
238 W. 72nd St. (Broadway)

SHAH STATIONERY
2795 Broadway (107th–108th)

SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY
2259 Broadway (81st St.)

SPRING STREET BOOKS, INC.
169 Spring St.

ST. MARK'S BOOKSHOP
13 St. Mark's Place

STATE NEWS
1243 3rd Ave. (71st–72nd)

STATE NEWS—WEST SIDE
2571 Broadway (96th–97th)

TOBACCO SHACK, INC.
1546 1st Ave. (80th–81st)

TOWER 67 NEWS
165 Amsterdam Ave.

WALDEN BOOKS
57 Broadway (Wall St.)

WAVERLY SMOKE
Waverly Place

WENDELL'S
302 W. 12th St.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alan Ryan

IS EGALITARIANISM DEAD?

A Problem for Socialists—and Others too

What follows is something I feel uncomfortable writing, to some degree uncomfortable even thinking. Growing up on R.H. Tawney's *Equality*, I have always believed that some form of egalitarianism—it may be hard to say just what form—is simply definitive of socialism. If socialists aren't egalitarians, what on earth might they be? Nor are my (perhaps idiosyncratic) doubts about egalitarianism the same as everyone's doubts about the "new world order." With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there plainly is a new world order. It is a bit of a letdown—much more unsettled and a lot less predictable than we hoped the post–cold war world would be—but its existence is hardly in doubt. That's quite a different context from any doubts about equality.

Though some conservatives say different, it is anything but true that we have created an egalitarian world and find ourselves disappointed with it. Such conservatives gesture at the fact that universal compulsory education has done nothing to curb the masses' taste for literary and musical trash, that universal access to better food has done nothing to curb the masses' taste for the crudest gastronomic experiences, and so endlessly on. They really do believe that there is greater equality in such spheres, and that the results are disappointing. But that's a hard case to argue; for one thing, the crudest humanitarianism suggests that the rather recent assurance to ordinary people of an adequate diet of unadulterated food—something that two-thirds of the world still longs for—is an achievement that simply swamps any rational anxiety about matters of taste.

It's almost as open and shut a case when it comes to comparing the lives of illiterate farm laborers with the lives of a literate industrial work force. The more sophisticated complaint is that goals such as equalizing educational opportunity are illusory: we may today teach algebra to children whose parents can't do simple multiplication, but they will never be the intellectual equals of children who can tackle calculus at the age of ten. Then, say such conservatives, the only "egalitarian" policy that anyone is likely to adopt will be that of simply eliminating from the syllabus whatever it is that the more talented are good at. So, we have moved toward a perverse egalitarianism, and to the degree that it has succeeded, disappointment is the only proper response.

An argument of the same kind is sometimes produced for political influence, too. The suggestion is that leaders tend to emerge no matter what—some people are all but genetically programmed to grasp power and organize others—but that the search for equality can pervert the process, too. The more the rank and file insist on not being led, the worse the leadership they will get, even though they will not themselves acquire any more power. So, greater political equality is a mistake, and anyway, there is less room for political equality than egalitarians suppose.

The case may be debatable where education, political influence, or general culture are concerned, partly because it is almost impossible to agree on definitions. But where income and wealth are concerned, the recent record is unequivocal. There has been no egalitarian pressure at all; quite the reverse. Indeed, in the face of the astonishing increase in the inequality of the distribution of wealth and income in the past decade and concomitant increases in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the unequal distribution of health care and good or bad health themselves, of vulnerability to crime, inequality of life expectancy, of education and the prospects for one's children, this may seem a very peculiar moment to wonder whether socialists need to talk about equality, for asking whether it was really equality we talked about in the first place.

But there are reasons for asking. One is that appeals to equality have cut little ice with electorates in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy over the past few years. This can't be because "a rising tide lifts all boats," and the worst off among us compare their current prosperity with their former poverty and rejoice: the real incomes of the poor have dropped over the past decade. It may be because few people read serious newspapers, never see the numbers, and don't generalize from their own experience. It may be because an insecure middle class suffers from a desperate "fear of falling" and flinches from contemplating the situation of anyone worse situated than itself. The sight of poverty, ill health, homelessness, and the rest doesn't so much induce compassion fatigue as the simple sentiment, "Thank God it's not me."

It must be true that some of the passive acceptance of gross inequality is due to ignorance of its extent, and some of the active acceptance the result of self-centered fear. All the same, I doubt whether the bulk of the electorate would respond with outrage if they had at their fingertips all the numbers that all the economists, sociologists, and investigative journalists in America know. In Britain particularly, the Labour party is unabashedly egalitarian, but its supporters chronically aren't. And it's not because they are peculiarly selfish or desperately concerned for their own survival. They simply don't respond to appeals to equality.

I don't deny that the electorate displays feelings of an "egalitarian" kind. The U.S. "House bank scandal" offers a nice example. The public was thoroughly confused about what had happened, what damage might have been done, and who might have suffered from it. Members of Congress found it an uphill struggle to persuade voters that there had been no theft of the taxpayers' money, no criminal action, not even a failed bank in the strict sense. For several this was another reason (on top of the substantial financial reasons) to resign this year and pocket unspent campaign funds. Voters who finally understood what had been going on weren't appeased; they had a simple complaint. They had no right to bounce checks, had no access to free overdraft facilities, and didn't see why members of Congress should have these things either.

On the other hand, it is clear that the public has no commitment to equality as a social goal. Not only do generalized income statistics make little impact, even particularized ones hardly register. The news that Lee Iacocca made $3 million in 1991, while the Chrysler Corporation lost $965 million, and Robert C. Stempel something over $2 million while General Motors lost $4.5 billion makes little impact on the general population. George Will expresses some fastidious anxiety whether capitalism will lose its moral credibility if the captains of industry are seen to be looting the vessels they are in charge of, but his fears seem premature. The public at large seems to take it for granted that voting yourself a massive and largely undeserved salary is what Mr. Dooley called "honest graft."

It isn't illegal, everyone who can do it does it, and the cost is spread so thinly across the "victims"—consumers who pay more for their cars, pensioners whose pension funds get lower returns, the workers whose pay pool is correspondingly shrunk—that nobody in particular feels hurt. This contrast between what looks like an egalitarian resentment of the privileges of legislators and an unbothered acceptance of pay differentials out of line with those of every other country suggests that principled egalitarianism is not one of the public's most urgent interests. It is also pretty odd.

Is there not something deeply peculiar about the way people admire the astonishing salaries paid to football, basketball, and baseball stars, but are maddened by proposals to put teachers' salaries up from, let us say, $40,000 to $50,000? There are some familiar explanations. One rests on the sociologists' idea that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we compare our position to that of a "reference group" that is physically or imaginatively or morally close at hand, and not with one that is more distant. If I make $40,000 a year, live next door to a school teacher, see that she gets longer vacations than I do and has greater job security, I resent her advantages and object to her earning another $10,000, especially when the connection between her pay and my taxes is as direct as it is in the United States. I don't live anywhere near Michael Jordan or Magic Johnson and don't compare my salary to theirs. If I don't make the comparison, I shan't ask why they do so much better than I, and shan't resent the fact that they do.

The imaginative distance between us is a reflection of the way they make their money by doing things I know I can't conceivably do. I can imagine being my next-door neighbor and teaching high school English and social studies; I can't imagine being Michael Jordan—or Michael Jackson or Harrison Ford—and probably can't readily imagine being Stempel or Iacocca either. The more remote the imaginative target, the less likely resentment is to set in.

This half answers one set of questions, but not the questions I want to raise. It explains why people accept the existence of great inequality—but the answer isn't very satisfying. It says only that people raise the question of the justice of inequality when the target of their doubts is brought into the comparison in an appropriate way. That only defers the question of how people are brought into the comparison. Why, to go back to my earlier example, do people get so enraged at politicians giving themselves check-cashing privileges, but accept without flinching the robber baron behavior of the Iacoccas and Stempels?

It can't be that they can more readily put themselves in the shoes of Newt Gingrich than Lee Iacocca—both are flamboyant, self-advertising characters who constantly invite the public to identify with them. Yet, Gingrich had to rein in the attempt to bash the Democratic majority in Congress with their check-bouncing misdeeds because he was being tarred with the same brush, while the nasty comparisons that the *New York Times* made between the salary that Iacocca draws from a struggling Chrysler corporation and the vastly more modest salaries that his successful Japanese competitors pay themselves have cut no ice with the public at large. The answer to these oddities must depend on what values people use to assess the justice and injustice of the way wealth, income, and the various goods and bads of everyday life are distributed. And here the interesting fact is that if people often demand egalitarian policies, it's not because they value equality.

In the United States particularly, but to an increasing extent in Europe, racial and ethnic divisions complicate all this, too. Egalitarianism depends on the thought that class is the crucial element and that operating on the hierarchy of income and wealth is the be-all and end-all of policy. But it often is not. Those of us who used to think that racial and ethnic conflict could be massaged away by full employment and antidiscrimination legislation are surely feeling a bit abashed these days. The recrudescence of ancient ethnic hatreds in Europe and in the remains of the former Soviet Union, along with the religious and racial tensions that poison French and German politics, suggest all too plausibly that what we wanted was not so much equality as integration, what the anthropologists would have described as "commensality"—the willingness to eat together, with all that that implies about the absence of taboos and fears of ritual impurity—and that that is just what we aren't getting. The recent horrors of Sarajevo and Dubrovnik are as ill a portent for American race relations as the rioting in Los Angeles after the acquittal of Rodney King's assailants. For they suggest both that the symbolic, emotive aspects of racial and ethnic distrust will—as we all know already—make it that much harder to achieve a closing of the economic gap between the races, and that even if that closing picks up again, it won't dissolve other hatreds and antipathies at all fast.

Reflection on the way we mix ambitions for prosperity, integration, access to a shared culture, and so on indicates not so much that principled egalitarianism has recently died as that it was never alive. To put it another way, "equality"—or the adjective "equal"—doesn't do much moral work in arguments about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

political power, social policy, politics, industrial organization, or whatever else. What "equality" mostly does is gesture at lurking background ideas that really to the work. This is not to say that there are no good arguments for particular equalizing measures—constitutional government, progressive taxation, school desegregation, curbs on managerial absolutism, opening higher education to new groups, social policies to make illness and old age less of a burden, and so endlessly on. There are excellent arguments for all of these things. The egalitarian thrust of the welfare state has been, and is, absolutely necessary. But it is not a thrust toward "equality."

There are some elderly (and unsatisfactory) versions of this point. It was a commonplace of academic political theory twenty years ago that demands for "equality" are really negative; they aren't demands that anything in particular should literally be distributed equally but complaints against existing ways of distributing it. The Declaration of Independence's view that we are born free and equal doesn't mean that we are really born free and equal—we are literally born absolutely vulnerable and dependent. The point is negative. It means that nobody is born entitled to hold political power; indeed, nobody is entitled who hasn't been chosen by those he or she governs. Being born George III doesn't count as a reason to be given authority over other people. This thought is meant to apply across the spectrum. Thus, "equal opportunity" means something other than equal opportunity: perhaps something like, "Don't select persons for employment and students for education according to the color of their skin, their sex, their parents' income, their relationship to yourself. . . ."

The idea that "equal opportunity" is only to be defined negatively can't be right, however. There must be some positive principle behind our choice of all the things we want to shut out. One device is to suggest that its positive content is explained by "relevance." To invoke equality is a matter of appealing to relevant grounds for distributing whatever goods and evils are at issue. Being born the grandson of George II is, as Tom Paine kept on reminding his contemporaries, not much of a qualification for governing; birth is "irrelevant" to the job.

In the same way, Bernard Williams once suggested that the demand for "equal access" to medical care was a way of saying that the possession of money is irrelevant to whether you need medical treatment, while being ill is not merely relevant but the only thing relevant. Equality as a goal for medical care then comes out as the slogan, "Hand out medical care according to illness, and not according to wealth, parentage, friendship with the doctor. . . ."

The idea of "relevance" picks up something; when voters get enraged by politicians setting up little privileges for themselves, part of the rage is because the privileges have nothing to do with the successful functioning of the legislature; it's irrelevant self-aggrandizement. But talk of relevance, just like pointing out the negative impact of arguments about equality, merely defers the real argument. "Select your employees for relevant reasons" leaves us with the real question—relevant to what? Suppose my partner and I are looking for a bookkeeper. I think that the fact that you're my cousin is overwhelmingly relevant—what is a business for if not to advance your friends and relations?—while my partner thinks it is overwhelmingly less relevant than the fact that you are unqualified to keep the books and use a computer. What, he might ask, is a business for if not to maximize its profits, to see it expand and prosper as a well-run undertaking?

Once the point is made, its implications are obvious. "Relevance" invites an argument about the purpose of whatever it is we are arguing about: if the goal of medicine is not only to cure existing ailments but to secure a healthy, long-lived, and productive population, we ought not to distribute its benefits only according to how ill people are but according to how much future good we are going to do—and that might lead us to spend less on the terminally ill and more on well-baby clinics, say. That would be an unwelcome conclusion to the terminally ill. In practice, of course, medical journals have long been full of controversies about how far people at the end of their lives should be able to go to get the care they want, whether or not it does much good, and the impact of its cost. Arguments like these are not arguments about equality;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are arguments about the proper goals of all sorts of activities and institutions.

Another implication is that appeals to "equality" often turn up when it's a matter of pointing out that a person who is short of one qualifying attribute is well qualified on another, and one that we are trying to get accepted as the main or only standard to be used. If it's hospice care for the terminally ill, the fact that I am as close to death as you is an argument for giving me the same treatment, although you can pay and I cannot. I'm not equally able to pay, but I am equally able to benefit. Here, too, "equally ill" doesn't rely on equality to do the moral work. Handing out care on the basis of ability to pay is less an offense against equality than against the principle that need ought to determine provision. The only situation in which equality would really be at sake is where two people with identical needs got very different treatment; if this was deliberate, it would be unfair—and unfairness is much the most powerful complaint against most sorts of inequality.

In cases like this, we are still working with the social democratic grain. The poor but ill ought to get the same medical attention as the rich and ill. Political authority may not be bought or inherited but must rest on popular consent. But many arguments invoke values that are sometimes egalitarian but more often are anything but—and this is most true when they are arguments against wastefulness and in favor of efficiency. In politics this happens whenever administrative competence is at stake; we want to spread the authority to decide on policy as widely as humanly possible, but we still want that policy to be implemented in an efficient manner. So we give everyone one vote each, but select civil servants on merit. The American spoils system is in that respect more egalitarian than most European selection procedures, and all the worse for it. The conflict is sharpest in education, where efficiency is a most uneasy partner of the egalitarianism of humanity and social solidarity.

Arguments for efficiency are highly persuasive. It is a waste of hospice care to give it to a rich neurotic who thinks he is dying but actually isn't. The same argument has been used for a century in education. It is a waste of university education to give it to the children of rich alumni; people qualified by intellectual ability and willingness to make an effort would make more use of it, do more good with it. Faculty effort would produce more intelligent twenty-two-year-olds if concentrated on the apt and ambitious and not on the idle offspring of well-to-do former students. In this context, "merit not money" is egalitarian. But efficiency and anti-waste alone are not generally egalitarian; intrinsically they are deaf to considerations of compensation, to humanitarian claims or solidaristic ones. In principle, they would produce a hierarchy, even though it is a hierarchy of merit. Michael Young's essay on *The Rise of the Meritocracy* pointed all this out ages ago—and even if Young was ahead of events in thinking that the meritocracy was rising rapidly, he was right about the principle.

Clever rich alumni offspring would qualify along with clever poor students; less clever poor students would get no boost from efficiency alone. To the extent that colleges and universities could see behind the effects of elementary and secondary schooling to the students' basic ability, they would no doubt pick up a lot more talented but untaught students. But that would be it. To see how far that is from a pure search for equality, we need only imagine the uproar if it was suggested that every eighteen-year-old be assigned to a college by random selection. That procedure would equalize every eighteen-year-old's chance of ending up at any particular place—at a high price.

It's the kind of example that shows how far most people are from strict egalitarianism. We almost all take it for granted that education may be looked at from the social angle as a resource for producing the next generation of economically effective young people, and from the individual perspective as a resource for giving us the chance to match our tastes and talents to available occupations. So far as the first aim goes, efficiency is the obvious goal; so far as the second goes, we remain deeply attached to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

individual desert. Equality divorced from one or both of these is charmless.

In early childhood, efficiency is usually a rather closer ally of egalitarianism. We might—as we finally are doing—look at the children of this country as human capital, and think it madly inefficient to allow the quality of education to be wholly dependent on local property taxes; but even here the search for efficiency is egalitarian only in passing, as it were—there's nothing in efficiency alone to encourage us to pick up slow learners or make allowances for emotional handicaps of one sort and another. All efficiency says is, "Bet on brains not money." It says nothing about what we ought to do if brains seem to be lacking.

To go further, we must appeal to other values. One is a generalized humanitarianism; it has more emotional appeal than logical structure, and for that reason is both widely popular and philosophically underexplored. Most of us cheerfully sacrifice efficiency at the margin in order to pull the less able or the more handicapped on board. A lot of education has less to do with preparing the next generation of workers than with inducting children into a shared culture. To all of that, ability in any job-related sense is mostly irrelevant. Even where we are thinking of education as training, there's much to be said for skepticism about our methods of distinguishing the more and less able. The politically correct enthusiasm for denying that any children are less able or more handicapped has been widely mocked, but there is a point to it.

Our ordinary notions of efficiency and ability are likely to be narrow, to be out of date, and to lead us into dismissing what we have simply not yet thought about properly. The history of the United States has been one of constantly discovering that people who have been dismissed as congenitally inept are nothing of the sort. Just about every immigrant group over the past hundred years was written off as ineducable on first arrival. But the humanitarian impulse simply says that individuals can contribute something other than unskilled labor to the future economy; they can here and now contribute to the school as a small, current society. To insist that every child has something to contribute is not a factual prediction about the world of the classroom but a moral demand—we should see all children as contributors not burdens, we should adjust our sights and find ways of making them members of whatever projects we have in mind.

If appeals to "equality" are often appeals to other ideas such as nonwastefulness, efficiency, a generalized humanitarianism, or, more specifically, to particular goals for particular social activities, such as the practice of medicine or education, it gets easier to see how people might not be egalitarians in general but have egalitarian passions in particular cases. If congressmen get elected by insisting that they're just plain folks eager to go to Washington to do a job of work, nobody minds their having large postage bills and a lot of secretarial help with constituency business, but God help them if they gad about in limos for no good reason and grant themselves little luxuries that don't help them do the job better. They can't start by assuring us that they don't think of themselves as intrinsically "better" than us and then behave like an aristocracy. That is an abuse of power, and at the first whiff of arrogance the electorate gets correspondingly irate.

None of this much advances the question of whether socialism is interestingly egalitarian. But it does point toward what I think is true: that it is the socialist conception of the good society that gives content to talk about abandoning "irrelevant" grounds of distinction. The French Revolution's ideal of *la carrière ouverte aux talents* was an ideal of equal opportunity in the sense we've seen already. Its slogan was egalitarian in that it implied "equal opportunities for equal abilities," but it was not committed to giving equal opportunities in spite of unequal abilities. This is why it marks the limits of liberal egalitarianism—competitors in the social race are to start level, so the race will reward them according to their merits. Socialist egalitarianism must go beyond it and abolish the whole idea of the social race.

What is involved in that thought? If liberal egalitarianism says, "Don't reward according to birth but according to merit as displayed in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

performance on the job," what does socialist egalitarianism say? A lot of the time, much the same. The liberal principle that reward ought to reflect contribution—the principle that Marx thought of as setting the limits of the "narrow horizon of bourgeois right" and providing the justice appropriate to the "lower stage" of socialism—is a meritocratic principle that we have to apply in any society where efficiency is still important. There's much to be said against meritocracy as a final goal—*The Rise of the Meritocracy* is an elegant account of why—but seeing how far we are from approaching it, it is premature to turn our backs on it. "Appoint on merit and not on party loyalty" would have done the former Soviet Union a lot of good, just as "Pay your CEO according to merit, not according to the prestige rankings prevalent at his country club" would do Chrysler some good too.

Social democracy has often recommended itself to a liberal electorate by claiming that social democracy is a matter of taking liberal goals seriously and actually trying to achieve them. Public education is needed because otherwise good schools are confined to the children of the rich, non-accommodated to the educational needs of children and the economic needs of the society. A national health service is needed because otherwise medical attention is supplied on the basis of ability to pay not on the basis of ill health on the one hand and the possibilities of promoting a healthier society on the other. There's nothing wrong with these arguments, only with a society that doesn't take them seriously.

The differences come elsewhere. One difference lies in the balance between an emphasis on need and an emphasis on desert. Most socialisms have been acutely conscious of human vulnerability. This is a place where egalitarianism has less to do with equality than with shifting emphasis. But the shift itself is of the greatest importance. It is the shift that makes socialism hospitable to ideas such as solidarity and makes liberalism less so; it is the shift that makes socialism less individualist than liberalism; it is the shift that makes socialism more morally and emotionally conservative than liberalism. It is the shift that reflects the fact that however much socialists share the liberals' concern for human rights, constitutional government, and democratic accountability, they start from a social, solidaristic vision of the world and not from the liberals' catalogue of individual rights. It is not a small shift.

To understand it, and to understand at the same time why the welfare state is egalitarian and popular while "equality" as a goal is not, we must think about luck. Or rather we must appreciate the contrast between how most people feel about luck and how political thinkers feel about it. Philosophers mostly hate luck. They would like a world where everything is arranged on rational lines. This isn't true only of system builders like Plato: John Rawls explains his *Theory of Justice* as an attempt to show how the purpose of just social institutions is to counter the "arbitrary" inequalities of nature. I have never thought that there was a large constituency for this undertaking. If you think of the way an ordinary working-class crowd spends its money on horse racing and football pools, it seems quite clear that arbitrary *good* fortune is not generally resented, and that so far from wishing to correct all the arbitrary inequalities of nature, people left to themselves set out to create new ones by gambling.

On the other hand, the view that society ought collectively to insure its members against *bad* luck is equally popular. In all countries where national health insurance has been created, the electorate is devoted to it; old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and disability insurance are equally popular. Programs that give benefits to able-bodied non-working people who are not in transitory unemployment are much less popular—the fact that they are small beer compared to the rest of the welfare state's expenditures doesn't appease critics. Undeserved misfortune is what people believe we should be helped with; deserved misfortune has no claim on assistance.

People's attitudes to luck are asymmetrical; they don't wish to scrutinize the good fortune of the winners—being born Michael Jordan is much like winning the lottery. In Britain, this used to produce the peculiar result that working-class respondents to surveys on such matters said they objected to the hard-earned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wealth of their employers but not to the inherited wealth of the traditional landed gentry. Some commentators thought this was a reflection of their traditional and deferential attitudes—old money in land was fine, new money in industry was not. More plausibly, it's a reflection of the fact that being the Duke of Westminster is the result of a genetic lottery, while you have seen how your boss got his money and don't much like it. Some perfectly nice person might draw the right card and be the duke; only someone mean, grasping, and oppressive could make money the way your boss did.

The question is whether these attitudes have any bearing on socialist egalitarianism. I think they do, though indirectly. The general hostility to any proposal that smacks of simple leveling goes very deep. If lots of things ought to be shared out more equally than the marketplace will do it, that's not because the ideal is a condition in which all outcomes are identical—that would frustrate the gambling instinct and the pleasure people take in simply being smiled on by fate. It isn't much good just pointing out that a lot of people get more than they deserve; most of us hope to get more than we deserve (and, given our propensity for folly and miscalculation, to suffer rather less than we deserve, too).

What is more plausible is to harp on two familiar things. The first is the need for more collective provision to defend the vulnerable—which will be egalitarian in the usual sense (that is, reducing the pretax income gap) because the vulnerable will get more expensive provision than they could pay for themselves. As to why collective provision is needed, social democratic mixed motivation is fine; collective provision can be, and when uncorruptly delivered, is, both efficient and good for social solidarity. The silliness of conservative bleating about "values" is at its worst here because conservatives won't think about the social conditions needed to build up mutual trust and moral respect; but it's no use for the left to just point that out. Successful communities are ones where the sense of reciprocal obligation reinforces itself through the daily experience of using and contributing to the arrangements for mutual defense, but for most of history such communities have sprung up by accident. Consciously to recreate them demands a holistic approach to town planning, social service administration, policing, education, and a lot more. Intellectually and politically, we are far from being able to deliver, but it wouldn't hurt to say more loudly what we need.

The other familiar truth we need to reassert is that there is an infinity of dimensions on which we don't need to think in terms of better and worse at all. One thing that equality in the sight of God used to mean was that God, having created us, had no need to rank us as better and worse—any more than we need to think *The Marriage of Figaro* better or worse than *Die Meistersinger*. Tawney's aim was a society in which anyone might tell anyone else to go to hell but nobody felt inclined to do so, where differences of income, power, authority, educational attainment, or whatever had no implications for prestige or deference. Here's an area where one kind of equality is readily within reach. We may find that whatever we do, job-related competence is unevenly distributed; we shall surely find that success as a pop singer, film actor, basketball player, and much else are very oddly distributed. And even our simple likings and dislikings are not much under our control. But in order to stop these natural and arbitrary inequalities poisoning our social life, what we mostly need is to keep our critical faculties in repair. And that need hardly wait for the socialist millenium. □

Stop Buying *Dissent*!

Subscribe now. Use the enclosed card.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mitchell Cohen

ROOTED COSMOPOLITANISM

Thoughts on the Left, Nationalism, and Multiculturalism

The resurgence of nationalism after the collapse of communism startled many observers in the West. What could have been more stark than the contrast between Western and Eastern Europe? As the European Community sought new modes of integration, nationalist virulence asserted itself in more than one of the previously communist lands. The bloody unraveling of Yugoslavia has been the most potent example, and the fear remains that the former Soviet Union could become Yugoslavia writ large. Evidently, Leninist and Stalinist dominion led neither to a withering away nor to the successful repression of national sentiments. (At the same time, Western European integration has proven to be a complicated matter, resisted in some quarters and accompanied by xenophobic outbursts in others.)

It is gradually becoming clear that nationalist aspirations were sometimes mistaken for democratic ambitions by Western observers of the momentous events between 1989 and 1991. Earlier, during the cold war, both theorists of totalitarianism and Stalinists, each for their own reasons, tried to convince us that ideology was redesigning in its own image every nook and cranny of—and brain cell in—Soviet-style societies. It is now evident how wrong they were, how much more complicated history has been. Much seems not to have been remade, but frozen or stunted or integrated and used by these regimes. National sentiment is one example, and it is a particularly thorny problem for the left.

The left, historically, never came adequately to grips with nationalism, and was often confounded by its intransigence. Consequently, its reemergence poses old quandaries anew. Marx's famous quip about modernity, that "all that's solid melts into air," would seem an appropriate metaphor for the last two years, save for one aspect of the modern world: national consciousness. Apart from circumstances in which nationalism served anti-imperialist purposes, the left has tended to wishful anticipation of the dissipation of nations. For example, Eric Hobsbawm, one of the finest Marxist historians, wrote as recently as 1990: "The owl of Minerva, which brings wisdom, said Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling around nations and nationalism."

The left, habitually, advanced two linked assertions about nations: that they are products of history and not embodiments of timeless collective essences; and they should be regarded as epiphenomena, that is, as secondary (if often bothersome) matters. I generally agree with the first point but think the second misconceived. Considerable contemporary scholarship—not only of the left—addresses precisely these issues. Anthony Smith, in his thoughtful book *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1987), elucidates them neatly by means of a (Greek) ontological twist. He reminds us that Parmenides, the ancient Eleatic, proposed that "what is, is." He meant that change, "becoming," is illusion. A "Parmenidean" approach discerns in nations something inherent in human existence, some-

An earlier version of this essay was presented to a conference entitled "Toward a Civil Society: Common Dilemmas and Common Perspectives of the European and American Left," sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Washington, D.C., September 1991.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing primordial that makes historical reappearances in varied guises yet that is in some way essential. The assumption is like that of Herder: nature creates nations. In contrast to Parmenides, Heraclitus of Epheus held that "all things are in a state of flux." A Heraclitian perspective on nations would emphasize their historicity. Nations, on this account, are a distinct product of modernity. They could not have come into being in earlier conditions, and will likely be transcended in the future. Thus Ernest Gellner, for instance, argues with characteristic erudition, in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), that nations come of the transition from "agro-literate" to industrial societies, and Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), contends that however subjectively ancient nationalists perceive their nations to be, they are objectively modern.

Smith seeks a middle ground between Parmenides and Heraclitus. He accepts the modernity of nations but traces their origins as far back as antiquity in what he calls *ethnie,* at whose core is a complex of myths and symbols tied to "the characteristic forms or styles and genres of certain historical configurations of peoples." All of them generate ethnocentrism, a sense of collective uniqueness and exclusivity that can be found, for example, in the oppositions between Greek and *barbaroi,* between Jews and pagan idolaters, in the self-conception of the Chinese as the Middle Kingdom, and in the Arab-Moslem notion of *Dar al-Islam.* In the West, an array of economic, political, and cultural transformations produced nations out of *ethnie.* So, rather than a break between premodernity and modernity, Smith perceives a political transformation leading from *ethnie* towards notions of common citizenship.

The "collective uniqueness" of a social entity is a problematic notion for Marxism, which ascribed the most salient features of human reality to social class and conceived the future to be embodied in a *universal* class whose interests represented those of humanity as a whole. The proletariat's victory was to give birth to a classless society—the first truly universal society. Nations and nationalism had to be viewed as epiphenomena. In the socialist future, with human "prehistory" left behind, there would be a new social individual dwelling amid socialist humanity. Nothing would mediate between the individual and the human community writ large.

Marx was radically Heraclitian. However, one can find in his writings on nationalism at least two paradigms, as Shlomo Avineri notes.[1] Before 1848 Marx believed that because of the universalizing tendencies of the capitalist market "national differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing" (*The Communist Manifesto*). National cultural distinctions among workers were, objectively, secondary matters—at best. As Marx wrote in his unfinished critique of Friedrich List (1845), "The nationality of the worker is neither French, nor English, nor German, it is *labor, free slavery, self-huckstering*. His government is neither French nor English nor German, it is *capital.* His native air is neither French nor German nor English, it is factory air."

In Marx's post-1848 paradigm, nationalism tends to be a superstructural device employed by the bourgeoisie in its pursuit of expanding markets abroad and domestic mastery. In the first paradigm, the natural course of capitalist development ought to lead to the withering away of nationalism; in the second paradigm, nationalism is sustained by capitalists, distracting proletarians from their class interests and leading to the intensification of conflicts among nations.[2]

Despite their divergences, the two paradigms are linked by Marx's insistence that "workers have no country." In both, nations and national cultures are viewed as historically created but, finally, as epiphenomena; Marx's ultimate vision is of a universal culture. It couldn't be otherwise if workers are the universal class, have no country, and breathe only factory air as their native air.

The difficulty is that this universal culture is something quite abstract. Here we may discern in Marx a problematic inheritance of Enlightenment rationalism. Now, few have been more incisive than Marx in criticizing bourgeois forms of abstract universalism, particularly concepts of the individual. He contrasted the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robinson Crusoe individual imagined by many capitalist ideologists with his own notion of "social individuals." In a trenchant passage in the *Grundrisse* he wrote:

> The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole. . . . The human being is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon* [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside society . . . is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other.

In short, the self-created rugged individualist is an ideological fiction.

But Marx did not go far enough, and he thereby encouraged an abstract proletarian internationalism in place of abstract bourgeois universalism. Among other things he should have said that individuals belong to greater wholes, not to a greater whole. Just as an individual is not an abstract entity, neither are the social realities through which one individuates oneself. The worker's native air may be factory air, and not French or German or English, but when the worker demands rights, it will be in French or German or English. By making a parallel between the producing and the speaking individual Marx—unintentionally—implies the essential point. Societies are differentiated not only through productive relations but through language and culture, particularly national languages and cultures in the modern era. The most fruitful Marxist analyses of nationalism recognized just this. In *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (1907) Otto Bauer argued that a nation is constituted by "common history as the effective cause, common culture and common descent as the means by which it produces its effects, a common language as the mediator of common culture, both its product and producer." Instead of proposing a classless society that would negate or homogenize national cultures, he advocated a federal socialist state that would provide national minorities with cultural autonomy on a "personal" (that is, nonterritorial) basis. Consequently, Bauer avoided the class reductionism that leads to an esperanto vision of socialist culture—a vision no less one-sided than that of nationalists who cannot see beyond their own tongues.

However, it is not true that all nationalists have had chauvinist views of the world and that all expressions of national sentiment represent particularist evil. For one example, a central current within the history of French socialism has been quite nationalist "when the nation in question represented the universal values of justice and progress" and anti-nationalist when *"la nation"* meant chauvinism and clericalism.[3] When Jean Jaurès rallied to the cause of the Dreyfusards, he refused to allow the right wing to be identified with *"la nation,"* and concurrently demanded of the left that it make the French republic together with universal human values its cause. Any assault on human rights had to be its charge, not solely proletarian interests narrowly defined.

Nationalists, like nationalisms, play different roles in different situations. As Avineri points out, in Marx's own day at least one socialist, Moses Hess, argued that nations should be conceived as mediators between the person and humanity.[4] Hess, in response to Jew-hatred, espoused a socialist Jewish state as one link in an international chain of national redemptions. The title of his 1862 tract—*Rom und Jerusalem*—was not incidental, for Mazzini had made essentially the same arguments, though with republicanism in the place of Hess's socialism. Moreover, the apostle of Italian nationalism did not preach devotion to the nation alone but told his followers: "You are *men* before you are *citizens*." Like his Jewish counterpart, he saw the nation as a mediator between the individual and humanity; Mazzini and Hess both proposed their peoples' independence as sparks for universal liberation and not solely as particularist enterprises. The agenda was not just a flag but a pacific world of free nations.[5] One may oppose their programs, find them bleary eyed, ill-conceived, or historically deluded, but they cannot be classified as belligerent exclusivists. It is true that neither Hess nor Mazzini elaborated their ideas with the trenchancy of the author of *Capital*. Yet they grasped something that the more formidable mind did not.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To recognize the modernity of nations and to discard the notion that they incarnate timeless collective essences should not be translated simplistically into the proposition that nations and nationalism are nothing more than epiphenomena. Although it is incorrect to speak of "nations" before, roughly, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and nationalism before the French revolution, national cultures and national consciousness take on an autonomy beyond their origins. It is as historically spurious as it is politically hazardous to homogenize nationalist movements and sentiments.

Let's take a contemporary example. I think it incumbent upon the left—and everyone else—to speak out forcefully on behalf of the Kurds. Not just forcefully, but honestly, which is impossible apart from advancing Kurdish national aspirations. Kurds sometimes define their aspirations as autonomy (within Iraq or Turkey), sometimes as independence; social democracy is not their priority. Shall we tell them that Westerners will support them so that in a future era they can embody Western leftist ideas of universal humanity (whatever those are nowadays)? It is difficult to imagine a more condescending posture. And what should Kurds make of the part of the left that, preoccupied singularly by anti-imperialist indignation, draws attention to the Kurdish tragedy solely to indict American policy in the Gulf (as if Saddam Hussein would otherwise have been benevolent)? My point is simple: this is an oppressed nationality. Kurds are oppressed as Kurds and not as members of generalized categories. Their problem must be addressed in its specificity. Their national sentiments are legitimate, both intrinsically and as a response to oppression.

I do not mean to underestimate the murderous catastrophes wrought by nationalist fanaticism, especially in our century. (The Kurds themselves do not have entirely clean historical hands; should an independent Kurdistan arise, one would demand of it the same respect of minority rights Kurds should have been afforded in Iraq or Turkey.) Rather, I want to argue against conceiving nationalism as an either/or proposition: either all its forms to be condemned or all its expressions to be sanctioned. Both possibilities are inherently perilous. Michael Walzer has suggested what seems to me to be a sagacious alternative, that of domesticating nationalism's more dangerous impulses, seeking to integrate and counterbalance them within broader pluralistic frameworks. A useful historical model, as he notes, is religion, which, once a primary source of slaughter throughout Europe, was domesticated after its battered apostles reconciled themselves to multireligious societies and, consequently, to tolerance. I would add that this ultimately meant resigning themselves to an important principle, one that is key to such domestication and to which I will presently return, that of the legitimacy of plural loyalties and therefore difference.

I employ the word "difference" with some hesitation, because it is now encumbered by faddish, often vacuous, usages. This baggage aside, "difference" is a vital historical and contemporary question in American and European societies. It has also been a longstanding problem for the left, rooted in that troublesome dimension of the left's Enlightenment heritage to which I alluded when discussing Marx. The friar tells Lessing's "Nathan the Wise": "You're a Christian soul! By God, a better Christian never lived." Nathan replies, "And well for us! For what makes me for you a Christian, makes yourself for me a Jew." A universal quality—reason—makes this identity of Christian and Jew possible. The tolerance suggested is based on equivalence, not acceptance of difference: the play is entitled "Nathan the Wise," not "Nathan the Jew." In later left-wing versions, membership in the universal class became the solvent of differences, on the way to a universal, classless society.

Yet, there are and will be "differences" not assimilable to sweeping universalist prescriptions. Although much of the left conceived the classless society as the melting pot of humanity, a striking alternative was formulated by an American radical not long before the U.S. entered World War I. It was a moment in which nativist prejudices against immigrants

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intensified considerably in this country. Many of these newcomers were stirred by European events, often asserting bonds to their "old countries." This begot huffy indignation, especially on the part of American Brahmins: why, these immigrants simply weren't becoming proper "Americans."

In his July 1916 essay, "Trans-national America," a young WASP named Randolph Bourne fashioned a remarkable retort. "As the unpleasant truth has come upon us that assimilation in this country was proceeding on lines very different from those we had marked out for it," he wrote, "we found ourselves inclined to blame those who were thwarting our prophecies. The truth became culpable." What was at stake was the relation between culture and democracy. "We act"—Bourne's "we" was dominant Anglo-America—"as if we want Americanization to take place only on our own terms, and not by the consent of the governed." Against the "thinly disguised panic which calls itself 'patriotism,' " he proposed celebrating as culturally invigorating the hyphen in Polish-American, Irish-American, Jewish-American, German-American, and so on. He went so far as to propose referring also to "English-Americans."

Instead of a melting pot, Bourne envisioned "trans-nationality." This was "a weaving back and forth with other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart the weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision." In a subsequent essay, Bourne argued that this thinking pointed toward "new concepts of the state, of nationality, of citizenship, of allegiance." Here we find a multidimensional conception of political society and human relations, one that implies an important democratic principle: the legitimacy of plural loyalties.

Perhaps I am not stretching the Austro-Marxists' purposes too far if I suggest that they too accepted this principle by championing a class politics aimed at fashioning a federal socialist republic in which there would be systems of both territorial representation and national linguistic cultural—personal—autonomy. This was at odds with the radical universalism of Marx or Luxemburg (and with the expectation that the state would wither away).

The Austro-Marxist position was expounded in a specific context: a debate inside a socialist movement within a multinational empire. One can also find a notion of plural loyalty articulated by the left within a national movement, with the use, notably, of metaphors like Bourne's—threads and cloth. In the late 1920s and early 1930s the growing dominance of the Labor-left within the Zionist movement was threatened by the right-wing "Revisionists" led by Vladimir Jabotinsky. The latter proclaimed himself a "pure" nationalist and denounced his adversaries as *"shaatnez,"* a mixture of wool and cotton proscribed in Jewish garments by religious orthodoxy. The national raiment, in his formulation, had to be unsullied by foreign admixtures and universalistic notions such as socialism. David Ben-Gurion, then Labor's leader and later the first premier of Israel, proclaimed the very concept of *shaatnez* to be a deceit. A national movement without social conceptions was an abstraction, and Zionism, like any national movement, could be good or bad depending on the society it fashioned. He declared—changing the metaphor—that unlike the right, the Zionist left stood not in one circle (that of nationalism) but in many circles, and "when we stand in two circles it isn't a question of standing in two separate areas, one moment in one and the next in another, but rather in what is common territory to both of them." He continued:

> In reality we don't stand within two circles alone, but within many circles—as citizens of Palestine we stand in the circle of the Land of Israel, as Jews we stand in the circle of a nation that aspires to its homeland, as workers we stand in the circle of the working class, as sons of our generation we stand in the circle of modern history; our women comrades stand in the circle of the working women's movement in its struggle for liberation.

To stand in many circles is to accept the principle of plural loyalties. It must be readily conceded that ascribing to such a principle and practicing it are two different things. But for my purposes here, it is the theoretical point that is most salient, together with the fact that it has direct implications for concepts of citizenship. This was articulated with acuity by one of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ben-Gurion's colleagues, the American Labor Zionist thinker Hayim Greenberg, in his 1948 essay, "Patriotism and Plural Loyalties." Greenberg took the example of an Italian-speaking Swiss citizen. "He hardly knows himself how many different loyalties he harbors in various degrees." As a Swiss he owes fidelity to Switzerland; he is also a patriot of his canton. Whatever his "race," he feels a cultural and linguistic kinship to Italians in Italy. If he is Catholic he feels ties to Catholics around the world and in various regards accepts the "sovereignty" of the Vatican. Poor man should he become a UN official. And we should add: if he is a she, she may well have keen allegiances to the women's movement.

How shall we regard this individual? As a bundle of prospective betrayals? Or ought we accept, indeed value, the legitimacy of "pluralist-social relationships, attachments, sentiments and loyalties"? The true democrat, maintained Greenberg, will seek not to destroy but to harmonize such differences.

Which doesn't mean that they are easily harmonized. Plural dimensions of human identity often don't rest easily with each other, and sometimes not at all. Such discontents are the hobgoblins of what I'd call "unidevotionalists," those vigilant and anxious beings who are endlessly obsessed with litmus tests of absolute loyalty. Alas, their questions and answers, always so earnest, are ever easy. For them it is unimaginable that an individual might actually face moral dilemmas, might confront legitimate conflicts of fealty, might have to inquire of the rights and wrongs of contesting demands, might be compelled to assess the consequences of embracing this or that position. Unidevotionalists have their flag; they salute it; they legitimate only particularisms, usually just their own. Such one-sidedness—no less than that of abstract universalism—frustrates democratic pluralism, which demands refusal of singular answers (to borrow again from Walzer).

It might seem that among today's advocates of multiculturalism a left has emerged that recognizes the problems I've been raising. Certainly, parallels to earlier discussions of national identity and culture can be found in the debates on multiculturalism. Yet I fear that too many votaries of multiculturalism have become unreflective celebrants of particularism, now that the working class has not fulfilled its universalizing mission. Missing is adequate meditation on the grounds of cultural diversity within a democratic society. Too often, the word "difference" is intoned indignantly without consideration of the "trans" of "transnationality," of the intersection of the hyphens Bourne—rightly—celebrated.

Bourne spoke of a cloth of many threads, but he still spoke of a cloth. If one asserts differences without conceptualizing the territory of multicultural exchange, one may reinvent just those particularist perils dreaded in nationalism by the historical left. In a world of resurgent nationalisms, and in an America debating multiculturalism, what is needed is the fashioning of a dialectical concept of root*ed* cosmopolitanism, which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and that rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground. □

Notes

[1] See Shlomo Avineri, "Toward a Socialist Theory of Nationalism," *Dissent*, Fall 1990.

[2] On this point see Michel Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review*, 96, March-April, 1976, p. 82.

[3] See the discussion of the relation between socialism, republicanism, and nationalism in K. Steven Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p. 116.

[4] Shlomo Avineri, *Moses Hess: Prophet of Communism and Zionism* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1985).

[5] Lenin, of course, advocated the self-determination of nations, but his argument is a utilitarian one that, unlike Hess's and Mazzini's, grants no intrinsic value to national cultures.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ian Roxborough

LATIN AMERICA: STILL IN TROUBLE

The Triumph of Neoliberalism

In the 1980s, democracy came to Latin America. Most countries created democratic institutions. Unparalleled opportunities seemed to open for the left. In Brazil, Argentina, and Peru, center-left governments were voted into office. Elsewhere (in Chile and El Salvador), Christian Democrats came to power. For democrats, a moment of historic opportunity seemed to have arrived.

But in the 1990s many began to fear that the moment had passed. Latin American governments were implementing regressive economic policies. Social democratic parties lost much of their support. One reason for the seeming setback to the left, of course, was the devastating economic crisis in 1982.

Another reason was the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union—further strengthening the world dominance of free-market ideology. As a result, Latin America now faces tremendous pressure from international financial institutions like the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, and from the international financial community more generally. These powerful agencies demand wide-ranging reforms aimed at increasing the role of markets.

The left in Latin America is in disarray. In most places, social democrats are overshadowed by nationalists and radicals of one persuasion or another. The left still has a considerable following in many countries. Mexico, Brazil, and Chile, for example, have large, well-organized left-wing parties. Despite the claims of Mexico's ruling party to have won the 1988 elections, detailed analysis suggests massive fraud; most likely, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, leader of the center-left PRD, was the real winner. In the Brazilian elections of 1990, a runoff pitted conservative Fernando Collor de Mello against Workers party candidate Lula. Although Collor won, nearly half the electorate voted for a leftist candidate from the labor movement. In Peru, the social democratic left is largely concentrated in APRA, and faces considerable competition from a variety of extreme left organizations. Having presided over a collapse of the economy at the end of the 1980s, APRA has lost much of its support. But it could still recover its position and present itself as a plausible governing party.

A similar situation holds for the Radical party in Argentina, though here there is also the difficulty of the historical capture of the organized working class by Peronism. In Nicaragua and El Salvador the situation of the social democratic left is unpromising; the insurrectionary movements of the 1980s have dominated the left. Finally, there are a number of countries, such as Colombia and Guatemala, where either traditional oligarchic parties or newer but equally elitist authoritarian forces continue to dominate the political scene. Thus the picture is mixed. Yet in the larger and more developed countries of the region a clearly identifiable mass base for a social democratic movement exists.

I would like to thank James Rule for his assistance in improving this article.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The challenge facing the Latin American left is not organizational but programmatic: the need for a coherent response to the neoliberal offensive. The problems are obvious: dealing with massive poverty, coping with the social decay of the big cities, restoring decent living standards and economic security to millions of workers badly hit by the economic crisis, reducing the inequality of income and wealth, getting economic growth going without sacrificing the living standards of low-income groups.

Finding the money to solve these problems will be very difficult. Governments have little tradition of relying on income taxes for revenue. Existing income-tax systems are inefficient and cover only a small proportion of the working population. Under-reporting and tax evasion are massive. Nor are voters fond of hearing proposals for increased taxes. Yet deficit spending by government in a situation of high inflation is far too risky. The answer must be increased taxation of the wealthy. In the highly unequal societies of Latin America, this represents a challenge of the first order.

Restructured Economies

But redressing Latin America's social injustices will require more than just money to pay for social programs. The region's economies require fundamental restructuring. The trouble is, these economies are subject to forces often beyond the immediate control of Latin American governments—including world interest rates, attitudes of international bankers toward debt repayment, and demand for Latin American products.

Yet governments *can* carry out reforms that will help a sound economic recovery. In part, this means accepting some of the recommendations of the World Bank and the IMF, which demand a reduction in the role of the state in the economy and an opening up of markets to international competition. In themselves, these policies have a great deal to recommend them. At the same time, deregulating the economy also threatens various safety blankets for the poor established by the more statist regimes of the past. A social democratic program will have to accept deregulation while seeking ways to protect the poor and redistribute income and wealth.

For most of the postwar period, social democracies have accomplished this by a combination of industrial policy, Keynesian demand management, and a redistributive welfare state. Yet the inflation-prone and increasingly open economies of Latin America today offer little scope for Keynesian demand management. And the limits to both redistribution and industrial policy are set by the need to attract foreign investment and to compete internationally with regard to labor costs.

One possible response for social democrats is to accentuate the dualism of the economies. In the sector producing goods and services, which are internationally competitive and where domestic production can be replaced by imports, deregulation is required to improve competitiveness. At the same time, much economic activity is aimed largely at domestic consumption; here imports are not likely to replace local products. Examples include services in the welfare sector, such as education and health, and provision of basic foodstuffs. In this sector, a social-democratic government can intervene with a wide range of measures (such as subsidies for basic foods, increased wages for teachers, and so on) without having to worry too much about market distortions.

In short, designing a macro-economic policy suitable for an open economy in a relatively poor region is difficult but not impossible. Convincing a large part of the electorate that this is the road to sustainable improvement is a harder task. The policies required have little instant sex appeal: social democrats in Latin America will have to work hard to build the popular awareness that must sustain such a program. They cannot rely on charismatic appeals and quick-fix solutions by populist leaders.

An Outmoded Order

Why is such far-reaching rethinking necessary? The development strategy that has predominated until the last few years in Latin America has involved active state intervention—in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

form of protectionism, market regulation, subsidies, and the like. It began as a defensive response to the economic difficulties of the 1930s depression and then, in the postwar period, became the conscious strategy adopted by most Latin American governments. For a long time, it worked. Real per-capita income rose on average at 2.5 percent per year during the 1960s and at 3.3 percent during the 1970s.

But both protectionism and government employment as patronage created numerous inefficiencies. Given the dependent nature of these economies, the failure to stimulate exports was particularly serious. Throughout the postwar period, the region's economies suffered from endemic inflation and balance-of-payments difficulties, leading to continual political turmoil. Latin America had fast growth, but at a cost.

But the new economic orthodoxy threatens to throw out the baby with the bath water. Latin America's postwar model of economic growth is now regarded (quite incorrectly) as having been a complete failure. But although growth was inefficient, the real culprit was the increasing indebtedness of these economies during the 1970s and the consequent debt crisis of 1982. The Colombian government carefully avoided accumulating a heavy foreign debt. As a result it largely avoided the debt crisis and managed to maintain satisfactory growth while maintaining a variant of the protectionist growth model.

The early 1980s were an economic disaster for much of Latin America. The immediate consequence of the debt crisis was a substantial reduction of inflows of foreign capital and increased payments on the debt. This in turn triggered a massive outflow of flight capital. The net transfer of resources from the developed world to Latin America went from positive to negative.

The results were recession and unemployment. During the period 1981–1990 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita dropped by 1.2 percent each year. At the end of 1991, GDP per capita was 8 percent less than it had been in 1980. In some countries real wages dropped by as much as 50 percent during the 1980s. The economic dislocations fueled inflation. In 1989 and 1990 the average yearly rate of inflation for Latin America as a whole was about 1,200 percent.

From Neoliberalism to Repressive Populism

With these economic dislocations came the wave of redemocratization. The new democracies had to consolidate themselves at a moment of extraordinary economic difficulty. By the late 1980s, many governments had adopted extreme versions of free-market economics, known in Latin America as "neoliberalism." The paradox was that elected civilian governments were putting into practice the kinds of tough economic policies that military dictatorships had attempted—and, with the exception of Pinochet's Chile, failed—to implement in the 1960s and 1970s.

The global dominance of neoliberal ideas, the "Washington consensus," has heavily constrained Latin American governments. With the end of the cold war, any form of state intervention in the economy is now suspect. In order to persuade foreign financial institutions, potential foreign investors, and the owners of flight capital that their country is once again a secure place to make fat profits, Latin American governments have become more orthodox than the pope. In the battle against inflation, Latin American governments—because of the importance of being seen (by the international financial community) to be orthodox—have little recourse but to apply severe recessionary measures, further driving wages down.

To some degree, this recourse to orthodoxy has worked. In 1991 flight capital began to return in a major way to Latin America. Stock markets in Chile, Mexico, and Argentina are booming. Growth for the region is again positive: GDP per capita rose by 0.8 percent in 1991, not a very dramatic figure, but striking by comparison to the recent past. And inflation had been brought down to a regional average of about 200 percent a year. The magnitude of reorganization of the political economy of Latin America is striking; it involves a complete abandonment of the growth model of the postwar period. Key elements include the dismantling of protective tariff barriers, the withdrawal of subsidies to manufacturers, the privatization of substantial areas of state enterprise, and serious efforts to achieve fiscal balance. Accompanying these measures are efforts to weaken the power of labor unions, either through reform of labor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

law or through state intervention in industrial disputes.

Latin American governments hope that entrepreneurs will seek out new export products and markets, and will produce more efficiently for the domestic market in order to meet the sudden influx of cheap foreign products. This may well happen. But the hope that a largely parasitic and state-dependent bourgeoisie will transform itself overnight into a group of competitive risk-taking entrepreneurs may turn out to be more fantasy than reality.

The reform program also places much hope on shrinking the state economic sector. This is partly driven by ideological considerations. But is also represents an effort to fight inflation by reducing subsidies and curtailing inefficient and bloated state administration. Privatizing state-owned enterprises is also a central part of the policy package. This is apt to bolster state finances for the next few years—until there are no longer any family jewels to sell.

The Price of Neoliberalism

Latin American governments are playing a game of smoke and mirrors with international investors. If a government can, through largely symbolic measures, convince the international financial community that it will pursue "sound" policies, then investors will bring money into the country, thereby creating the basis for real growth.

The obvious risk is that something could abort this long process of confidence building. A series of corruption scandals, a run on the currency, a collapse of the stock market, the imminent electoral victory of an "unreliable" opposition party, a military revolt, or political impasse and the stagnation of a government's reform program could trigger off capital flight and economic collapse.

Thus state managers must prevent political challenges that threaten the neoliberal order. Particularly as growth resumes there will be increasing demands from the poorer sections of society for measures to improve their standard of living. Managing these expectations is not an impossible task, but it is certainly fraught with danger and requires great political skill.

One of the more startling recent events in Latin America is the political identifications of the figures backing neoliberal economic policies. Alberto Fujimori in Peru was elected as an alternative to the draconian free-market reforms proposed by right winger Mario Vargas Llosa, Peronist candidate Carlos Saúl Menem in Argentina was elected by a mass working-class constituency on the promise of massive wage increases, in Venezuela Carlos Andres Pérez was elected largely on the basis of his history as a pro-labor politician, and in Brazil large numbers of poor people voted maverick Fernando Collor into office on an anticorruption platform. Once in office each of these governments shifted to neoliberal policies, betraying the expectations of their supporters. In office, these presidents have adopted an autocratic style, often ruling by decree, and appealing directly to "the people" in what some would see as a classical populist manner.

The seizure of power by President Fujimori in April of this year was only the most dramatic illustration of this trend. The weakening of party systems, the plebiscitarian conduct of the presidents, the total irrelevance of campaign promises all militate against democratic politics. They amount to plebiscitarian "democracy," with strong populist and authoritarian overtones.

But this is populism without redistribution, a demagogic populism—the other face of the neoliberal conjuring trick. Popularly elected governments have kicked their supporters in the teeth and yet retain, however tenuously, sufficient popular support to govern and even to win elections. They have convinced the electorate that the old system no longer works. The twin traumas of prolonged military dictatorship and hyperinflation have generated a great desire for stability and personal security.

Prospects for the Left

With the economy in recession, most people are concerned with immediate survival. But as governments succeed in attracting foreign (and flight) capital, upper and middle classes are apt to prosper. Gross national product increases, but the trickle-down effect on the incomes of the poor is slow to materialize. An imbalance

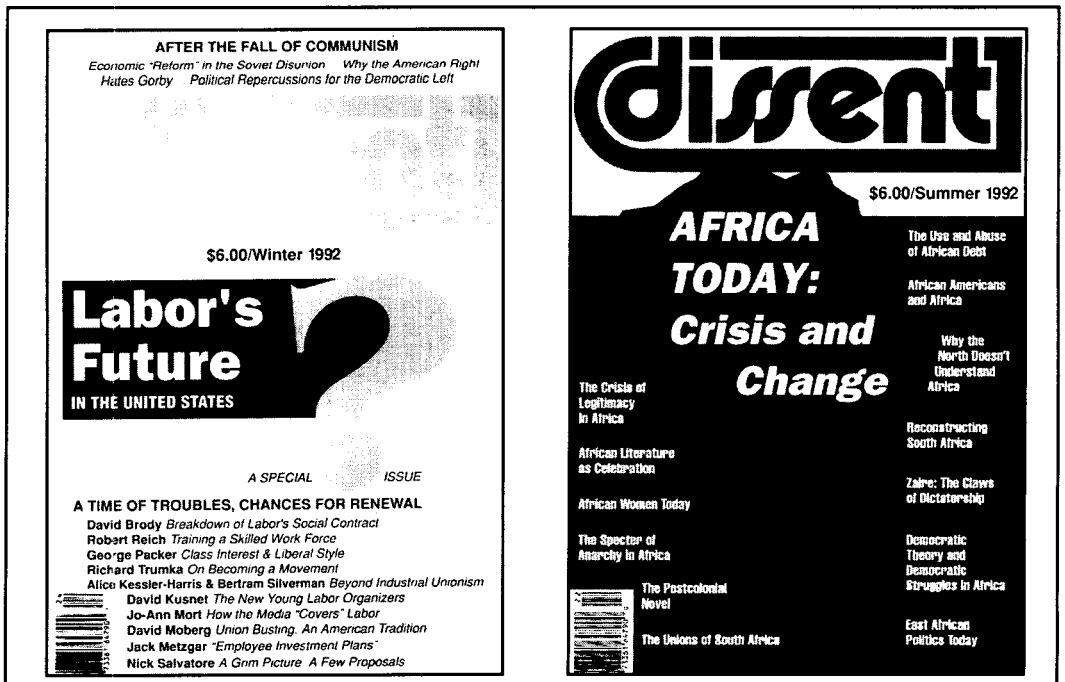
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between prosperity for the rich and continued hardship for the working class (as well as for large sectors of the middle classes) can create an explosive situation.

A case in point is Venezuela, the best economic performer in the region in 1991, with a per-capita growth rate of about 7 percent. Despite this impressive growth, and despite its long history (by Latin American standards) of democracy, Venezuela faced a serious military revolt in February 1992 and mass rioting in March. Neoliberalism makes already highly unequal societies yet more unequal while at the same time it cuts out such safety nets for the poor as had been provided by welfare and labor legislation. Labor's share of total income fell steadily from 44 percent in 1988 to 37 percent in 1989 and 35 percent in 1990. And despite overall economic growth, real wages continued to fall in 1991. Small wonder that there was widespread dissatisfaction and a willingness to countenance violence.

The challenge for social democracy in Latin America arises from the tremendous pressure for immediate and substantial improvement in the lot of the working poor. Hence the appeal of Sendero Luminoso in Peru. That there should be sizable support for a party that has many affinities with the Khmer Rouge is alarming. Besides its eschatalogical promises, Sendero also offers a personal sense of power and discipline and of belonging to a community of true believers.

This apocalyptic view deserves no support from the left. Yet we would be willfully blind if we did not recognize the deep resonance of its appeal. The despair to which a decade of economic crisis, and its neoliberal response, have driven much of the Latin American population has found its expression in a chiliastic and authoritarian vision. This is the true measure of the depths of the crisis facing the continent. Neoliberalism may offer a dim light at the end of the tunnel. But it is hardly an appealing prospect for the masses of Latin America. Between the Scylla of Sendero and the Charybdis of neoliberalism, the real hope for Latin America must surely lie in a return of social democracy to the forefront. □


AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM
Economic "Reform" in the Soviet Disunion Why the American Right Hates Gorby Political Repercussions for the Democratic Left
$6.00/Winter 1992
Labor's Future
IN THE UNITED STATES
A SPECIAL ISSUE
A TIME OF TROUBLES, CHANCES FOR RENEWAL
David Brody Breakdown of Labor's Social Contract
Robert Reich Training a Skilled Work Force
George Packer Class Interest & Liberal Style
Richard Trumka On Becoming a Movement
Alice Kessler-Harris & Bertram Silverman Beyond Industrial Unionism
David Kusnet The New Young Labor Organizers
Jo-Ann Mort How the Media "Covers" Labor
David Moberg Union Busting. An American Tradition
Jack Metzgar "Employee Investment Plans"
Nick Salvatore A Gnm Picture A Few Proposals
dissent
$6.00/Summer 1992
AFRICA TODAY: Crisis and Change
The Use and Abuse of African Debt
African Americans and Africa
Why the North Doesn't Understand Africa
The Crisis of Legitimacy in Africa
Reconstructing South Africa
African Literature as Celebration
Zaire: The Claws of Dictatorship
African Women Today
The Specter of Anarchy in Africa
Democratic Theory and Democratic Struggles in Africa
The Postcolonial Novel
East African Politics Today
The Unions of South Africa

Dissent in the Classroom

Unbeatable quantity rates: $3.50 per copy plus shipping. Call 212-595-3084 or write to *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roy Medvedev

AFTER THE COMMUNIST COLLAPSE

New Political Tendencies in Russia

Moscow

On Saturday, August 24, 1991, a huge crowd surrounded the buildings of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (CC-CPSU) on Staraya Square in Moscow. The defeat of the conservative putsch that had begun on August 19 and Mikhail Gorbachev's return to Moscow on the night of August 21 did not mean that the president of the USSR could once again fulfill his functions. The Soviet government, in whose name the prime minister, Valentin Pavlov, had joined the State Committee on the Emergency Situation, was paralyzed, its ministers suspended from duty. The head of the president's office, Valery Boldin, a major participant in the attempted coup, was under arrest, together with the chairman of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, the minister of defense, Marshal Dmitry Yazov, and the chairman of the secretariat of the CC-CPSU, Oleg Shenin. The minister of internal affairs, Boris Pugo, had committed suicide. From the evening of August 21 power in Moscow shifted almost entirely into the hands of Boris Yeltsin, who could dictate whatever terms he wished to Gorbachev.

At the press conference on August 22, Gorbachev spoke both as president of the USSR and as general secretary of the CC-CPSU. He stressed his adherence to socialism and tried to defend ordinary members of the Communist party. On Friday, August 23, at the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation (RSFSR), which was transmitted live on television, he tried to prevent Yeltsin from publicly signing a decree that banned the activities of the CPSU in Russia. Ridiculed by the Russian deputies and humiliated by Yeltsin, Gorbachev yielded, however, apparently hoping at least to save his position as president of the USSR. On August 24 the announcement of his resignation as general secretary of the CC-CPSU was read on radio and television. He also admitted that the leaders of the CC-CPSU had taken part in the attempted coup and called on the CC-CPSU to "take a difficult but honest decision about its dissolution," although he must have understood that it was impossible to call a plenary meeting of the Central Committee to take such a decision. He did not resign from the party and he kept his party membership card.

After announcing his resignation as general secretary, Gorbachev, as president of the USSR, signed a special decree "On the property of the Communist party of the USSR." The decree instructed the Congresses of People's Deputies to "place the property of the CPSU under protection" and to decide about its future use "in strict accordance with the laws of the USSR and republics on property and public organizations." The decree thus allowed the mayor of Moscow, Gavriil Popov, to place "under protection" only the building of the Moscow committee of the CPSU. Boris Yeltsin could only decide the fate of the Communist party of the RSFSR. The buildings and property of the CC-CPSU, on the other hand, should have been placed in the temporary custody of the president of the USSR and the USSR Supreme Soviet. But by then nobody was paying much attention to the strict letter of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the law. The minister of internal affairs of the RSFSR, who was supervising the seizure of the CC buildings on Staraya Square, received an order to conduct a "blitzkrieg" and to include all the buildings of the CC-CPSU. Hoping to find important documents, the special "capture group" of the Moscow and Russian departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs arrived at the CC buildings at 4 p.m. and ordered all workers to quit the buildings without briefcases within an hour, leaving their doors and safes open.

Despite the fact that it was Saturday, the most important CC employees were at their desks. There was some suspicion that they were busy destroying important documents. The instruction to evacuate the buildings came as a complete surprise. Central Committee Secretary Valentin Falin immediately contacted Gorbachev on his direct line, expecting instructions. However, Gorbachev merely confirmed that the seizure had been discussed with him and answered brusquely, "Do you really not understand the position I'm in?" This was a clear hint that even he was subordinate to someone else. However, he arranged that, when they had locked their offices and safes, CC secretaries, department heads and Politburo members could leave the building through a secret underground exit so as to avoid the main entrances around which an over-excited crowd was waiting. All the government and party buildings in the center of Moscow and in the Kremlin are connected by a complex system of underground passages with secret exits at three metro stations.

Gorbachev's arrangement made it possible for the leaders of the CC-CPSU to take various documents with them. But when they descended by special lift from the fifth, "nomenklatura" floor, they found that they could traverse only one underground passage. A steel door closed off the second section of the tunnel and they could not open it. They were forced to turn back, part with their briefcases, and leave by the main exit, enduring a search and the humiliation of the crowd. From that moment onwards, the CC-CPSU and all other central and regional committees of the CPSU ceased to function. The anticommunist revolution, led by Boris Yeltsin, ended with the victory of the democratic forces and the people. The capture of the building of the CC-CPSU in August 1991 in Moscow, like the seizure of the Winter Palace in Petrograd in October 1917, symbolized the overthrow of the old order.

The Popular Revolution

The expulsion of the leading workers of the CPSU from their luxurious buildings and offices in Moscow and other towns was the final act of the anticommunist movement, which had wide popular support. The movement had been gaining strength since the spring of 1989, when the first partially democratic elections in the history of the USSR (of USSR deputies) took place. The defeat of many party "apparatchiks," particularly in the provinces, came as a great shock to the party leadership. Perestroika had not made life better, and the food situation continued to deteriorate. It should, therefore, have been possible to predict that people would protest against the party that had ruled since 1917. Despite the popular protest, however, both Gorbachev and the CC kept control over the work of the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, not least because a third of the deputies, including most of the Politburo members, had been elected not from territorial wards but as delegates of party and public organizations.

The elections to the republican parliaments in the spring of 1990 demonstrated even more strongly that many people no longer supported the CPSU. The CPSU was removed from power in six republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova) and nationalist groups took over. The continuing economic crisis had further eroded the party's popular support. Effective anticommunist propaganda in the press had also played an important part. Most of the population believed the promises of the nationalists that a transition to a market economy would improve living conditions and bring the same level of consumer and food products as the abundance that existed in the developed countries of the West. The collapse of communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe offered a graphic example of what had become possible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nonetheless, the main "battle" between the CPSU and the bloc of parties united against it in "Democratic Russia" took place in June 1991 during the election of the president of the Russian Federation. The CPSU could not put forward a single popular candidate in the elections. The impressive victory of Boris Yeltsin, standing on an anticommunist platform, was a historic defeat for the CPSU. It signified the transfer of power in the Russian Federation to a complex bloc of various parties and groups united primarily by their anticommunism. From that moment a peculiar form of dual power existed in the USSR. At the level of the union—in the central government and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR—the CPSU retained power. However, the largest republic of the Union, Russia, and six other republics refused to obey the central government. They passed laws that contradicted both the constitution and the laws of the USSR. The putsch on August 19, 1991 was a hapless attempt by the center to regain its lost power. The defeat of the coup was, without doubt, fatal both for the center and for the CPSU.

The CPSU was not an ordinary parliamentary political party. It was a powerful, multimillion-member organization that managed everything in the country, including the economy. The collapse of this organization led to the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union as a unitary superpower. The majority of the Soviet population, particularly in Russia and the Central Asian republics, certainly did not want the Union to be eliminated. What they basically wanted was its democratic transformation. However, the democratic parties that had begun to form in Russia and the other republics after the removal in February 1990 of the CPSU's constitutional monopoly of the "leading and guiding role" in society, were small and weak. The political vacuum caused by the ban on Communist party activity was quickly filled, first and foremost by nationalist parties and movements that could relatively quickly, particularly in the national republics, appeal to the population with anti-Soviet and often anti-Russian, and not only anticommunist, declarations. In many national autonomous republics Russia was still perceived as the nucleus of the colonial empire.

In Russia Yeltsin came to power on a wave of anticommunist feeling augmented by Russian nationalism, although, unlike Rukh in the Ukraine or Sajudis in Lithuania, it was not concentrated in a single mass organization. The press, radio, television, and, particularly, the Orthodox Church and Russian emigrants abroad (particularly powerful in the person of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and his widely distributed pamphlet about Russia) constantly emphasized that the *Russian people* were the main victims of the communist, "Soviet" dictatorship. Yeltsin was rapturously accepted in Russia specifically as the "Russian" leader who had liberated Russia from the communism that was foreign to it. However, the attitude toward Yeltsin in the national republics of the USSR and in the national autonomies of the Russian Federation itself was either negative or restrained.

The historical essence of Russian nationalism is, without doubt, imperial. The disintegration of the USSR was, therefore, not so much the result of the victory of "democratic" forces as the product of nationalist pressure. Since it was not the outcome of careful preparation, negotiations, and agreements but took the form of a kind of explosion, it became necessary to resolve major problems of complex international relations after the premature birth of new, independent, sovereign states rather than before. This has created innumerable conflict situations both between these states and within the Russian Federation itself.

Formation of Political Parties

The popular revolution of August to December 1991 can be compared to the February Revolution in 1917. The power of the Russian monarchy rested on a centuries-old tradition, a large nobility, an officer corps and a Cossack caste, and on an extensive bureaucracy (not to mention the police and gendarmerie). In spite of this, czarism collapsed in the face of relatively weak political pressure localized in Petrograd and supported by spontaneous popular protest and strikes caused by food shortages and the long war. The February revolution was not organized by a party, and the struggle for power between various parties only began after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the revolution. The February revolution, as is known, also strengthened the nationalist movements in the Russian empire. The Central Ukrainian Rada (parliament), for example, did not recognize the provisional government in Petrograd and hoped to create an independent Ukrainian republic that would include the Crimea and that would own the Black Sea fleet.

The collapse of the CPSU in August 1991 was just as rapid and as general as the fall of czarism in February 1917. The Communist party and its leaders were defended neither by white- nor blue-collar workers nor by kolkhoz farmers. Among the intelligentsia, hardly a voice was raised in defense of the CPSU, with the exception of a few teachers of Marxism-Leninism in the universities. The most popular leaders (Boris Yeltsin, Anatoly Sobchak, Gavriil Popov) had ostentatiously left the party in 1990 or not long before the August coup in 1991 (as Edvard Shevardnadze, Alexander Yakovlev, and Alexander Rutskoi had done). After the coup the only way that leaders who had remained members of the CC or the Politburo or even of CPSU regional committees could retain their influence was to repudiate the party and leave it as quickly as possible. This is what Leonid Kravchuk, Nursultan Nazerbayev, and Stanislav Shushkevich did. Only in the republics of Central Asia and in Azerbaijan did Communist parties, having changed their names to "socialist" or "national-democratic" and having supported the independence and sovereignty of their republics, retain their positions. In the Moslem republics nationalism was espoused first and foremost by fundamentalist religious groups from which the urban population did not expect a market economy and democracy.

The new leaders who came to power in Russia were not by nature party people. In his electoral speeches, Boris Yeltsin had emphasized that the president of Russia should not belong to a political party. The leadership of the RSFSR relied on the authority of one populist leader, Yeltsin, and not on party programs. In October 1991 Yeltsin combined the post of president of Russia with that of prime minister. In November he was given "emergency powers" which gave him the right to issue legally binding decrees and to appoint people to any government post without reference to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Later he also became minister of defense of the RSFSR (renamed the Russian Federation in January 1992). It was thought necessary to have such authoritarian power and to combine legislative and executive functions in one person in order to implement economic reforms—the shift from a "socialist" planned economy to a market economy based on competition between producers and private property—as quickly as possible.

In effect, an authoritarian dictatorship appeared in Russia, but it existed parallel to parliamentary democracy. Political freedoms were not abolished and parliament (the Supreme Soviet) and the president both had the right to issue laws. A new type of dual power arose, reproduced in every region, where Yeltsin's "regents" (local representatives of the president later called "governors" at the regional level and "prefects" at the district level) often had more power than the elected local government. The appearance of two parallel systems of power was justified by reference to the continuing strong influence of the CPSU in elected provincial bodies. However, one has to consider that such a system lays the groundwork for a direct dictatorship in case the democratic process turns the country in the direction of socialism.

In their struggle for power, the "democrats" did not have a clear economic program apart from vague promises to change to a more effective market economy. Nonetheless, several factors allowed them to hope that they could improve the economic situation very rapidly. First, they would have access to the enormous confiscated property and finances of the CPSU—thousands of buildings in towns, dachas, sanatoria, resort facilities, special clinics, and car pools, as well as billions of rubles and hundreds of millions of dollars. Second, there would be a sharp decrease in military spending and in expenditure on various prestige projects, such as space exploration. Third, they would rapidly privatize state

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

property and housing. Fourth, they hoped to receive Western credits and aid.

With the exception of humanitarian aid from the West, none of their expectations led to an early improvement in the economy. In fact, the disintegration of the USSR caused so many new problems in the food and financial spheres that the economy of Russia soon teetered on the edge of catastrophe. A real danger of hunger loomed, particularly in large towns.

With the rapid impoverishment of most people and the simultaneous existence of political freedoms, the revival of communist and socialist movements and parties as a legal opposition to the existing regime was inevitable. Moreover, it was obvious that the policies of the "democrats" did not reflect the interests of blue- or white-collar workers or of collective and state farm members, in other words, of all those people who in any society belong to the category of wage labor and depend on fixed salaries. The economic situation of about 90 percent of the population of Russia, and particularly of pensioners and students, began to decline sharply in January 1992, falling below the official poverty level. Capitalism began to advance in Russia, sweeping away all the social gains of the workers, which had been achieved in the course of almost one hundred years of social-democratic, socialist and communist movements.

The collapse of the CPSU left Russia virtually without national political organizations. Although formally about fifty different political parties and groups existed by July 1991, some of them officially registered, in practice their influence did not extend beyond Moscow and Leningrad. The best known was the Liberal-Democratic party, formed by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who stood against Yeltsin in the presidential elections in the RSFSR, winning 7 percent of the vote. Judging by its program, this party belongs to the category of national socialism. The main center party, Democratic Russia, was formed when several democratic parties and political groups united in a single bloc during the electoral campaign for the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. It had many active members in Moscow and Leningrad but was very weak in the provinces. In most regions of Russia this bloc is not strong enough to win local elections, and because of this Yeltsin has passed a special decree postponing local elections until December 1992.

Communist and Socialist Parties

At the Twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU in Moscow in the summer of 1990 it was already obvious that the twenty million members of the CPSU had begun to splinter into fractions. After the banning of the CPSU each of these fractions began to form separate organizations.

The All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (VKPB) Within the CPSU a small Stalinist group arose in 1989 headed by Nina Andreeva, who had formulated a "Bolshevik platform." Even before August 1991 this group had tried to remove Gorbachev from the post of general secretary of the CC-CPSU. After the coup, "Bolshevik platform" activists held a founding congress in St. Petersburg on November 8, 1991 attended by 164 delegates from 18 regions of the USSR. The organizers tried to create an "All-Union" rather than a "Russian" party, despite the fact that it was impossible to register an All-Union party legally. The congress adopted a name for the party in the historical tradition, calling it the "All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks" or VKPB, in an attempt to resurrect the name VKP(b), which is what the Leninist-Stalinist party was called until 1952. The program of the VKPB promised to reestablish Soviet power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and to retain the status of the USSR as a great power. Nina Andreeva was elected leader of the party (general secretary) and fifteen full and four candidate members were elected to its Central Committee. The party statutes were copied from the statutes of the VKP(b). Because the party has not been legally registered, it has been leading an underground existence.

The Russian Communist Workers Party (RKRP) If the VKPB brought together the extreme right, Stalinist wing of the CPSU and had very few supporters (the number of members is still not known), a larger tendency in the former CPSU, conservative as far as the economy is concerned rather than from a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

historical point of view, formed the Russian Communist Workers party, or RKRP. This faction began to organize itself in 1989 at the founding conference of the United Front of Workers (OFR), which took place in Leningrad on July 15–16, 1989. The OFR was formed as an international response to the nationalist popular fronts in the republics. Basically it united the Russian minorities in the national republics and its main task became the defense of the rights of the Russian minorities in the Baltic Republics, Moldavia, and the Caucasus. The initiative for forming the Communist party of the RSFSR in 1990 as a Russian organization within the CPSU came from the OFR.

The banning of the activities of the CPSU and of the Communist party of the RSFSR did not formally extend to the OFR. After August 1991 various "initiative groups" within the OFR began to organize a new political party. It was formed at a founding congress on November 23–24, 1991 in Ekaterinburg (formerly Sverdlovsk). Five hundred and twenty-five delegates attended the congress, coming from almost all the regions and larger towns of Russia. The statutes of the RKRP are, to a large extent, reminiscent of the statutes of the CPSU, and the party has retained the principle of "democratic centralism." The Central Committee of the RKRP must consist of at least 50 percent workers and peasants. At present it has a collective leadership in the form of an Organizational Bureau. Among its better known members are General Albert Makashov, who stood as a candidate (on behalf of the Political Administration of the Soviet Army) in the RSFSR presidential elections, and several leading figures from the ideological department of the CC-CPSU (including Richard Kosolapov, former editor of the party journal, *Kommunist*). The RKRP has been officially registered with the Ministry of Justice of the RSFSR and its central bodies are located in St. Petersburg, which continues to be called Leningrad in all the documents of the party.

The Party of Labor (PL) The third party that has its roots in the political movements that arose before August 1991 is the Party of Labor (PL). It can be traced back to the creation of a committee of New Socialists in 1989 that held a congress in 1990 and formed a small Socialist party of the USSR. Its main ideologist is Boris Kagarlitsky, a young Marxist who has written a number of books that have been published abroad but not yet in the USSR. Highly educated young socialists, some of them Trotskyist in orientation, who were influenced by the Western New Left, have long aspired to form a New Left party. Kagarlitsky and some other officials of the Socialist party of the USSR successfully took part in the elections to the Moscow City Soviet and were elected as deputies. To rid themselves of a purely intelligentsia base the party united with the Moscow Federation of Labor in 1991 and became the Party of Labor. In an announcement published on August 28, 1991, the PL expressed the intention of becoming the political organization of trade unions. However, the development of the PL has been very slow and it is confined primarily to Moscow. It has not yet had its first congress, although it held an interregional conference in Moscow in January 1992 at which a Russian organizational committee of the Party of Labor was formed. The PL is firmly opposed to the Yeltsin government and to the Moscow mayoralty.

The Democratic Platform of the CPSU and the Republican Party of the Russian Federation (RPRF) Perestroika and the democratization of Soviet society led in 1989 to the creation of numerous regional party clubs such as Communists for Perestroika, Democratic Platform of the CPSU, and others. During the selection of delegates to the Twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU these party clubs began to work out new, more democratic statutes for the CPSU that rejected the principle of democratic centralism. The Higher Party School in Moscow and its rector, Viacheslav N. Shostakovsky, were at the center of this movement. Gennady Burbulis, Yeltsin's close friend who had headed the Sverdlovsk party club and was an elected People's Deputy of the USSR, was also an active participant, and Gavriil Popov and Yuri Chernichenko belonged to it until they broke with the CPSU. Within the CPSU this faction tried to elaborate the principles of "democratic socialism." It supported a multiparty system and set itself the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

task of turning the CPSU into a parliamentary party.

About a hundred of the delegates to the Twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU belonged to the Democratic Platform of the CPSU. When it became clear that conservatives were dominating the congress, many members of the Democratic Platform resolved to leave the CPSU and form their own party called (in November 1990) the Republican party of the Russian Federation. This party, which had about 20,000 members at the end of 1990, has now joined the Democratic Russia movement and abandoned its socialist program.

The Union of Communists (SK) and the Russian Party of Communists (RPK) Believing that Gorbachev's policies were deviating from a number of fundamental principles of Marxism, a group of members formed the Marxist Platform of the CPSU shortly before the selection of delegates to the Twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU. In June 1990 the Marxist Platform held a large conference in Moscow attended by representatives from six republics and about forty regions of the USSR. Unlike the Democratic Platform, the Marxist Platform took an active part in the work of the Twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU and its leaders (A.A. Prigarin and A.V. Buzgalin) were elected to the CC-CPSU. They also actively participated in the work on the new, more democratic program of the CPSU.

The leaders of the Marxist Platform quickly recovered from the shock of the collapse of the CPSU. Its coordinating council called a small conference in Moscow on September 7, 1991, in which about thirty people took part. The conference chose an organizational committee under the chairmanship of A.A. Prigarin and decided to begin work on the formation of a new communist party called the Union of Communists (after the organization for which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848). The founding conference of the Union of Communists took place in the town of Zheleznodorozhny (near Moscow) on November 16–17, 1991. One hundred and two delegates from ten regions and one hundred and eight representatives of individual groups of CPSU members attended the conference, which adopted statutes and a program. The conference also called for amalgamation with other groups in a future "United Communist party."

The Union of Communists was officially registered as a public organization with the Ministry of Justice of the RSFSR. However, while it prepared for its first congress, a split occurred because of disagreements over the issue of private ownership of the means of production and land. The more orthodox Marxists objected to any form of private property. The arguments delayed the convocation of the first congress, which had been planned for February 1992. Breakaway orthodox delegates to the founding conference held a new conference at which they formed the Russian Party of Communists (RPK) under the chairmanship of A.V. Kryuchkov, formerly a member of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the RSFSR. The RPK has not yet been formally registered: it has only two thousand members and the RSFSR law on public organizations requires that a new party must present a list of no fewer than five thousand members in order to register with the Ministry of Justice.

The Democratic Party of Communists of Russia (DPKR) and the People's Party of Free Russia (NPSR) These two names reflect the political evolution of the parliamentary group led by Alexander Rutskoi, Communists for Democracy, at the Congress of People's Deputies and in the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. In the March 1990 elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR, many members of the CPSU who had been nominated as candidates refused to be part of the official parliamentary group, or fraction of the CPSU. In the summer of 1990, after the formation of a conservative Communist party of the RSFSR under the leadership of Ivan Polozkov, a split occurred among the CPSU members who were People's Deputies of the RSFSR. Polozkov headed the fraction Communists of Russia, which consisted of about three hundred people, while Rutskoi headed the Communists for Democracy, which consisted of about one hundred people. Polozkov's fraction opposed Yeltsin's election as chairman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Rutskoi's fraction, on the other hand, supported Yeltsin and ensured his election. This was why Yeltsin offered Rutskoi the post of vice president of the Russian Federation in 1991.

The appearance at the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR of a legally formed fraction, Communists for Democracy, which was neither subordinate to the CC-CPSU nor to the CC of the Communist party of the RSFSR, stimulated an extraparliamentary movement, Communists for Democracy, and the formation of similar groups in the Moscow City Soviet and other regional Soviets. Alexander Rutskoi was a popular figure, an air force colonel and an Afghan war hero.

After he became vice president, Rutskoi decided to form a new political party on the basis of his parliamentary fraction. The founding conference of this party, called the Democratic Party of Communists of Russia (DPKR), took place in Moscow on August 3, 1991. At that time the DPKR only had seven thousand members, and although they disassociated themselves from the Communist party of the RSFSR, many of them were still members of the CPSU. The CC-CPSU took the view, however, that there could not be a "party within a party" as they made preparations to expel members of the DPKR from the CPSU, and they removed Rutskoi from the CC-CPSU.

The banning of the CPSU at the end of August did not extend to the DPKR, and at the end of October 1991 the DPKR held its first congress. At that meeting the party changed its name, trying to distance itself from the word that connected it to communism. However, the party's new name, the People's Party of Free Russia, creates problems. There is already a People's Party of Russia (PPR), formed by Tel'man Gdlyan (Gdlyan, formerly a People's Deputy of the USSR, achieved fame as one of the investigators of the USSR Procuracy involved in the fight against corruption in Uzbekistan). The DPKR, which is often simply called Rutskoi's party, has about fifty thousand members at present.

The Socialist Party of Labor (SPL) At the end of 1989, liberal groups that supported Gorbachev's reforms began to form within the CPSU. They also supported a new program for the CPSU, rejected the CPSU's monopoly of political power, and wanted the CPSU to become more democratic. Not really radical, these groups formed a centrist section of the CPSU. After the banning of the CPSU these liberal groups decided to form a new left-wing party based not on a new program but on the liberal and, in essence, social democratic program of the CPSU, a draft of which had been approved by the last plenum of the CC-CPSU in July 1991.

The best known supporters of these ideas were members of the CC-CPSU (elected to the CC in 1990) and USSR People's Deputies, Roy A. Medvedev and Anatoly A. Denisov, and also V.I. Sevast'yanov, People's Deputy of the RSFSR and a well-known cosmonaut. Several other People's Deputies of the RSFSR and secretaries of CPSU regional and city committees joined the initiative group.

The initiative group published an announcement in the central newspapers, *Pravda*, *Glasnost*, and *Sovetskaya Rossiya* at the beginning of October 1991, proposing the formation of a new party of "left socialist orientation" on the basis of "progressive forces of the CPSU." The founding conference of the new party, called the Socialist Party of Labor (SPL), took place in Moscow on October 26. It was attended by 315 delegates from 68 regions and republics of the RSFSR and it confirmed the statutes and provisional program of the SPL. In November 1991 the SPL was officially registered with the Ministry of Justice of the RSFSR, which speeded up the formation of local organizations and preparations for its first congress in Moscow on December 21–22, 1991.

The congress was attended by 298 delegates from 65 regions of the RSFSR. About seventy delegates from eastern regions could not attend because of poor weather and cancelled flights. Among the delegates were about eighty-five People's Deputies of various levels, with a clear predominance of members of the scientific-technical intelligentsia (about 50 percent of delegates). The congress elected a collective leadership consisting of seven cochairmen and a Federal Council of 105 people. The membership of the SPL rose rapidly: when the first congress was held the membership was 15,000,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but by March 1992 it had grown to 70,000. About 30 RSFSR People's Deputies had joined, including the chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, R. Abdulatipov, and his deputy, V. Syrovatko.

In membership and program, the SPL can be considered the legal heir to the CPSU. However, it is determined to avoid creating an "apparatus" separate from its elected bodies, and it does not recognize the principle of democratic centralism. This ensures that broad discussion will take place about policy and strategy. The SPL is opposed to the policies of the Yeltsin government, since it considers that if the transition to a market economy is too rapid it will be a destructive process. At the same time, it recognizes the advantages of a mixed economy. Unlike the parliamentary parties, which are active only during elections and serve the interests of parliamentary fractions, the territorial sections of the SPL will work permanently in cooperation with the trade unions.

Other Left-Wing Parties of Russia At present (in April 1992) a Workers Party of Russia is in the process of organizing itself. Its founding conference took place in Moscow on February 15, 1992. A Trotskyist party, the Spartakovtsy, is also being formed, and it intends to join the Fourth International. Since none of these parties have passed the five-thousand-member threshold, they cannot be officially registered, which hinders their organizational work.

At this early stage of self-organization the existence of a large number of socialist and left-wing parties in the RSFSR is both inevitable and useful. It is probable that blocs of left-wing parties will be created in the near future with common platforms and strategies. The Russian Federation is a new state, which has existed for only several months. Its internal political development has only just begun. Given the extreme economic crisis, the end of which is not yet in sight, it is left-wing socialist parties in particular that may become very strong in the future, on condition, of course, that Russia continues to respect democratic freedoms and the rights of the individual.

Translated from the Russian by MARGOT LIGHT □

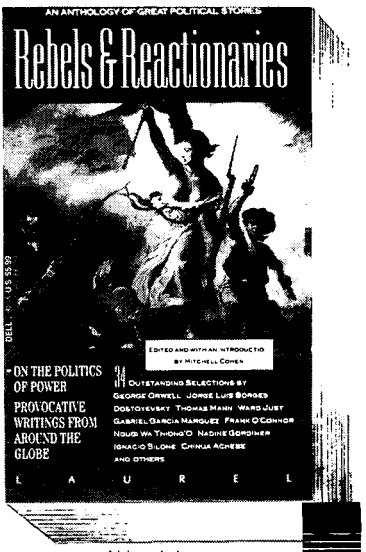
A provocative collection of timeless political writings from around the globe.

Edited and with an introduction by Mitchell Cohen

Oppression and injustice, war and revolution have inspired the world's most passionate writing *and* its wisest. Gathered together in this unique volume are thirty-four short stories about societies in upheaval, countries under the heel of tyrants, and people caught up in the movements and machinations of politics. But the real heart of all these stories is its fighting words—the ideals men and women are willing to die for—as editor Mitchell Cohen juxtaposes world-famous tales with hard-to-find stories from the Soviet Union and Africa to give this collection an exceptional depth and rich variety that will captivate the reader from the first story to the last.

Includes stories by:
▪ George Orwell ▪ Jorge Luis Borges ▪ Dostoyevsky ▪ Thomas Mann ▪ Ward Just ▪ Gabriel García Márquez ▪ Frank O'Connor ▪ Ngugi Wa Thiong'O ▪ Nadine Gordimer ▪ Ignacio Silone ▪ Chinua Achebe ▪ and others

"REBELS AND REACTIONARIES is a first-rate anthology of stories that deals with political life, either as activity or idea. The selections are all of very high literary quality, and the range tthey show is very impressive. The editor's introduction keenly raises some of the problems faced by writers who turn to politics as a subject. All in all, a fine piece of work." — Irving Howe


AN ANTHOLOGY OF GREAT POLITICAL STORIES
Rebels & Reactionaries
ON THE POLITICS OF POWER
PROVOCATIVE WRITINGS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE
EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTIO BY MITCHELL COHEN
34 OUTSTANDING SELECTIONS BY
GEORGE ORWELL JORGE LUIS BORGES
DOSTOYEVSKY THOMAS MANN WARD JUST
GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ FRANK O'CONNOR
NGUGI WA THIONG'O NADINE GORDIMER
IGNACIO SILONE CHINUA ACHEBE
AND OTHERS
LAUREL

At bookstores now

Dell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nicholas Werth

IN THE YEARS OF PERESTROIKA

Workers' Actions, Workers' Politics in the USSR

"Hitherto, it was on the periphery of the Empire that conflicts and explosions had occurred; and it must be admitted that they had not really come as a surprise. But now, it is against the very center of our system that the large-scale workers' strikes are directed, the power of the Party," which presumably represented "the future and the aspirations of the working class. . . . This did come as a complete surprise to everyone: our Marxist theoreticians, our bureaucrats, our technocrats and to us, the intellectual democrats. How often, in our Moscow kitchens, have we scoffed at the passivity and ignorance of the working class!"

These lines, quoted from an editorial in the *Literaturnaia Gazeta* at the time of the major strikes by miners in Donbas and Kuzbas in July 1989, provide a basis for a discussion of the worker movement in the Soviet Union during the troubled period of perestroika. Since 1985–1986 the call for reforms from above launched social currents, with resistance from the conservatives and opposition from elements wanting more radical changes. The result was to force the reformers to adapt their program to the demands and the pace of a movement stimulated by the new-found freedom of speech. As a result, the intelligentsia and then the nationalities began to stir. The working class, meanwhile, remained, in the words Rosa Luxemburg used to describe the German working class in 1918, in a state of "rigor mortis."

This article, which originally appeared in the French journal *Le Débat,* is printed here with the kind permission of its editors and the author.

There had, of course, been some strikes here and there, but most of them were connected with conflicts between nationalities. The workers on strike in mountainous Karabakh, in Erevan, in Georgia, or in Vilnius, were, first and foremost, Armenians, Georgians, or Lithuanians fighting for their national rights. But the mass strikes of the miners in the summer of 1989—a completely new phenomenon—came as a great shock to the Soviet authorities and to the intelligentsia.

To begin with, the miners did not limit themselves to economic demands. They proclaimed their lack of confidence in the existing institutions and traditional authorities.

Second, and equally astonishing, they did not explode in blind rage, as both the government and the intelligentsia thought might happen. Instead, the strike was highly organized and well led.

Were the soviet authorities faced with a nationwide movement, on the lines of the Polish Solidarity? Once the initial shock was over, observers—both foreign and Soviet—thought that might be the case. Now, three years after the "hot summer" of 1989, it seems that events went further than expected, but not so far as they might have gone.

Up until now, despite the constitution of "independent trade unions" and of a "Confederation of Labor," no organization comparable to Solidarity has made its appearance on a national scale. The strike movements, though they have, in the three past years, spread to other sectors (metallurgy, textiles, construction, and so on) and to other regions (for example, Belarus, Urals, the Vorkuta basin, St. Petersburg, Kiev) have not been continu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ous. Since the "hot summer," in fact, there have been only two real "strike periods"—in the autumn of 1989 and, above all, the spring of 1991. The number of strikers involved increased from about six hundred thousand in 1989 to over three million in the first half of 1991—relatively low in view of the tens of millions of industrial workers, but considerable in a country where, for seventy years, the very idea of a strike had been inconceivable (among not only the authorities, but also the vast majority of the workers themselves).

The most important point in the long run was what happened in the time between the strikes, even in those enterprises where no strikes had occurred: a "silent revolution," almost unnoticed by the media, both Soviet and Western, which concentrated either on "inter-ethnic" conflicts or the rivalry between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. This "silent revolution" gave birth to thousands of worker groups, work committees, workers' clubs, and other strike committees, which, in some cases, went beyond the rights granted to them by the new legislation on enterprises and quickly became "micro-power centers." The committees, within a year or even a few months, either took power, or superseded the existing trade-union and political organs, proceeding by and large by peaceful means. In some industrial regions affected by the strikes (Donbas, Kuzbas, Belarus, Urals, the Vorkuta Basin) the strike committees replaced not only the trade-union and political structures in the enterprises but the local power structures as well.

In this sense, the events of 1989 were reminiscent of what had happened in 1917: there came into being (usually in large enterprises) a collection of autonomous centers whose existence made clear the breakdown of the existing political and economic structures.

When the Bolsheviks on October 26, 1917 instituted "workers' control" they only legalized a situation that had existed since the summer of 1917. So with Yeltsin when in July 1991 he decreed the elimination of the party committees in enterprises—this merely confirmed the existing state of affairs. The process of eliminating party influence in the work place and administration had, in fact, begun before the decree came into force. Worker groups in a growing number of enterprises had already been taking over the party premises.

Three Generations of Soviet Workers

In order to understand the development, complexity, and ambiguity of the worker movement in the USSR at the time of perestroika, it is essential to take account of the profound transformations that have occurred in the organization of the world of work during the past few years of "real socialism." The world of work, as Moshe Lewin recently said, has remained "terra incognita," both for Soviet sociologists and for Western researchers. Significantly, the institute specializing in the study of the workers' world in the USSR was called the "Institute of the International Labor Movement" (IMRD). This institute has, until recent years, paid far more attention to the working class in Vietnam or in Cuba than to that of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Soviet working class has always had a mythic status, in a state controlled by the party, representing "the political expression of the will of the proletariat, the ruling class of Soviet society." The only conflicts that could exist within enterprises or branches of industry were those of a "non-antagonistic" nature. The few sociological studies made of the working world dealt only with such subjects as "the raising of the educational level of the working class" or "the out-of-work activities of the various categories of workers," and so on. These surveys carefully omitted any analysis of the relations between the working class and the institutions, the authorities, and the whole power apparatus. The investigation of these problems was generally left to certain institutions that submitted confidential reports on "public opinion" to the authorities.

Since the beginning of the thirties, the policy adopted by the Soviet authorities toward the working class had been a subtle combination of repression (under Stalin, the right to work had been defined by the harsh labor regulations of 1932 and 1938 and the introduction of the labor book) with the possibility of promotion for the "best" workers. The resulting fluidity bene-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fited the regime in two ways. On the one hand, it suppressed the memories of a social group regarded officially as the "ruling class," thereby accentuating its atomization and depoliticization. On the other hand, it preserved the mechanisms by which a social consensus was maintained at the height of Stalinism. The mass recruitment of workers to membership in the party was taken to symbolize the union between the party and the people.

Since the end of the fifties, the situation had evolved into less repression (the harsh labor laws had been abrogated by Khrushchev in 1956) but fewer real possibilities of social promotion. And the channels of social mobility were gradually narrowed in the years from 1960 to 1985.

L.A. Gordon and V.V. Komarovsky have studied three generations of the Soviet working class. Their work illustrates very clearly the interactions, tensions, and conflicts in the machinery of social mobility. Members of the first generation (born in the 1910 decade, and beginning their active life in the thirties) took the country through the stage of industrialization, without themselves benefiting much from it. The workers were manual laborers of the traditional type; many of them were former peasants still engaging in physical work, but of a different type. Promotion was by "on the job training," not necessarily involving any extra training or material advantage. Those of the second generation, born in the thirties, beginning their active life in the fifties, had the advantage of possible promotion through education; and their standard of living improved considerably, particularly during the post-Stalin era. The transition from the communal apartment to an individual one became the symbol of this improvement in the standard of living. This generation of workers in the fifty to fifty-five age group is no doubt the one most attached to communism.

Workers of the third generation (born in the period 1950–1960 and entering their active life in the years 1970–1980) seemed, at the beginning, to have a good chance of promotion through education. In actual fact, though most of them had the advantage of a secondary education (or specialized secondary education), access to higher education, as shown by J. Markiewicz-Lagneau, in *Education, Equality and Socialism* (Anthropos: Paris, 1971), was, from the end of the 1960s, more and more difficult for children of working-class origin. Surveys made of a number of specific work milieus (Donbas miners, metallurgists in the Urals) show that the promotion rate slowed down considerably during the past ten years. Donbas and Kuzbas minters demonstrated the truth of "born a miner, die a miner."

On the other hand, the reduction of the average age of the working class (in the 1970s, 93 percent of industrial workers were recruited from among the under twenty-fives) and the raising of the general level of education (76 percent of young workers taken on during the twelfth five-year plan had received a secondary education) led, particularly after the second half of the seventies, to a latent social crisis, manifested by various signs such as widespread discontent among young workers who had received a good education and technical training. Their professional hopes were not realized, and their chances of promotion were slight, despite high qualifications. A survey carried out in Leningrad in the mid-sixties showed that 35 percent of young workers were dissatisfied with their working conditions; in 1978, this percentage had risen to more than 72 percent. As Gordon and Komarovski write: "This third generation is no longer satisfied with the existing economic mechanisms and production relations." Although the social relations imposed by the "administrative control system" were bearable in the years 1930–1940 or even during the 1950s, when the industrial workers (mostly ex-peasants cooped up in collective farms, not free to travel because of the internal passport system) were subject to strict military discipline, such conditions were no longer acceptable to the new generation of urban workers in the years 1970–1980.

In addition to the social and professional rigidity, another factor also came into play—the steady drop in the prestige attached to manual occupations, although officially the population was still encouraged to enter them. The proportion of workers joining the party had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

continued to drop throughout the seventies, although, in 1983, 44 percent of the members of the party were still workers. It should, however, be borne in mind that, at a time when social mobility was restricted, and the elite more and more firmly ensconced, many people joined the party as a pure formality, without any political motivation.

Living Standards and the Quality of Work

From the economic viewpoint, the end of the Brezhnev era was marked by a slow, gradual deterioration of the workers' living standard. The real improvement in living standards in 1960–1975 began to slow down in the second half of the seventies, according to various Soviet statistics on consumption, although there are few really reliable statistics. In a deficit economy, the wage level, taken by itself, has only relative importance as an indication of living standards. The quality of the food supplies available in a certain region or even an individual enterprise is difficult to determine with any certainty, owing to the introduction, toward the end of the seventies, of a parallel channel through which workers were able to obtain scarce commodities directly from their place of work. This was the "order," or "zakaz" system, organized by the trade unions or workers' committees. As a result, workers' living standards depended not on their wages but on the different services supplied by various social funds. In this situation, it was more advantageous to be employed as an unskilled laborer in a "rich" enterprise, such as the tractor factory in Minsk situated in a generally well-supplied region, than to be a skilled miner in a small town in the Donetz area, where fresh produce was scarce. Extra rubles in the pay "check" were of little use when everything was in short supply. They were only good for deposits into savings accounts. In 1983, worker families in the Donetz region had, on average, savings equivalent to six months' salary.

Such widely different situations, due to the nonexistence of a really unified market, had several results: It tended to atomize the working class, to develop a spirit of loyalty to one's place of work, while encouraging the work force to be constantly on the move despite the guarantee of full employment. The "tekuchka" (frequent changing of jobs) continued to constitute (as it had done since the thirties) a form of workers' protest, a substitute for striking, which was forbidden. And worker discontent continued to take a passive form, as it had for decades past: absenteeism, poor-quality production, and, above all, low output.

Although withdrawal of efficiency, to use Lewin's term—increased worker resistance to speeding the pace of work, extra hours, bonus-changes, lack of safety and hygiene provisions, and so on—constituted the principal form of worker resistance in the sixties and seventies, it was not the only form it took. It is true that the two attempts to set up an independent trade union—that of the engineer Klebanov at the end of 1977, and that of the Human Rights militants, who at the end of 1978 set up the SMOT (Free Workers' Interprofessional Union)—failed dismally. These organizations never had more than a few hundred members. For all this, strike movements, though still not numerous at the national level, were no longer an exceptional event. According to Soviet sources, there were in the years 1975–1985 some sixty or so major strikes. Most of them were inspired by local complaints affecting certain enterprises (increased speed-up, dismissal of workers for "professional errors," salary cuts, and so on). Most of these strikes were quickly crushed.

The Andropov-Chernenko interregnum was marked by a distinct worsening of the "socio-professional climate" (in Soviet sociologese). The revelation of many cases of large-scale corruption (the "caviar scandal," the "diamond scandal") involving top figures in the Brezhnev regime (and Brezhnev himself) finally convinced the average person of the corruption of the rulers, so that the ground was now prepared for a "loss of confidence" in the existing authorities and institutions. On December 11, 1982, a month after the death of Brezhnev, *Pravda,* departing from its usual practice, published the minutes of the last meeting of the Politburo, dealing with the discussion of the large number of letters received from workers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and peasants, complaining of "degradation of work," the "fabrication of statistics," the arbitrary allocation of bonuses and housing, the misappropriation of funds, and other "contraventions of law and justice." By this "communiqué," which was followed by proposals designed to reinforce the penalties for "corruption, nepotism, misappropriation of funds and bribery," the authorities signaled their intention to fight energetically against all illicit activities for the purpose of improving the moral principles governing public life.

This campaign was not without precedent, for Stalin had, on many occasions, appealed to the population to wage war against the corruption of the "bosses who take the view that the Soviet laws apply not to them, but to the little people." But this time, as J. Medvedev points out, the campaign was the result less of a political maneuver than of strong pressure from below, the working class in particular. Corruption had spread to all levels, so that the workers had come to believe that the shortages of commodities and consumer goods were in fact engineered by the officials, the nomenklaturists, who obtained high-quality goods through shops reserved for their exclusive use, their special distribution network, and their personal relations, leaving the honest workers with nothing but their bread ration.

The campaign against corruption did not last long. Abandoning the attack on the major scandals implicating high party officials who ran a veritable "Soviet Mafia," it turned soon to more modest forms of a parallel economy, such as moonlighting or black marketeering in a small way. It ended with a campaign to reinforce discipline at the workplace. "Though all may not depend on discipline, everything begins with discipline," Andropov declared in a speech made on November 22, 1982, presenting his program of "economic reform." To improve management and make the economy more efficient by increasing the productivity of labor—such were the long-term aims. Meanwhile, Andropov proposed the simplest method of stopping the drop in productivity—by reducing wastage and reinforcing labor discipline. The campaign against wastage, for several months on end, mobilized the whole of the press and all the trade unions. There was no end of talk. The reinforcement of discipline took the form of spectacular measures with the main symbol of Andropov's accession to power imprinted in people's memory: supervision of workers' diligence; identity checks in lines outside shops (to detect workers going in search of provisions instead of working); police checks in public baths (for the same purpose); change of shops' opening hours. At the same time, the government imposed heavier penalties for failure to respect work rules and raised food prices considerably. The result of all these measures, based not so much on the "Hungarian mode" praised by certain economists as on the martial law then in force in Poland, was to add greatly to worker discontent.

Increase of Worker Discontent

The situation when the new team came into power, in 1985, was as follows: expressed through the worker movement was discontent of various kinds, mainly by passive resistance, practiced widely by the working class since the thirties. In addition to purely economic complaints, due to the standard of living, never easy to put into figures and, in any case, subject to wide variations, there were also complaints of a more political nature: against the "new overlords," said to be corrupt and arrogant, and more vague and general ones about the constriction of social mobility, which, until the seventies, had remained fairly open.

These complaints did not lead to open conflict for a number of reasons: the constraint still exercised on the worker groups by the official trade union or political structures to which they were attached and the absence of information about what was happening elsewhere. The working world was still very split, with divisions between enterprises, privileged and less privileged; industrial centers, some better supplied than others; between workers, skilled and unskilled; between generations. In short, between those whose only real desire was for the traditional "first give us something to eat, and then make your demands!" and those increasingly dissatisfied with a system,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which, after frustrating their consumer wants, now blocked individual advance, and this in a society, a "workers' state" no less, where the worker is, in reality, at the bottom of the social scale even though his or her wage may be higher than that of many intellectuals.

From 1985–1986 onward, glasnost and the call for reforms led to the development of a social climate that was to transform the feelings of discontent into a well-organized protest movement, to the great surprise of the intelligentsia, long regarded as the only section of the population capable of organizing political resistance. This movement, which was to culminate in the mass strikes of the summer of 1989, was inspired by two factors: first, the ideological upheavals generated by glasnost; and second, economic upheavals, bringing labor problems hitherto unknown to Soviet society.

The first new factor was that people became aware that they had been exploited; to quote the words of a leader of the labor movement in the Donbas: "[A]fter thinking that we were earning three hundred rubles a month we realized that what we were really 'earning' was less than ten dollars a month." Glasnost for the Soviet workers meant the discovery of the outside world, the way people lived abroad or in the "forbidden zone" (the title of a widely popular film that came out in 1988, showing in detail the privileges enjoyed by the nomenclatura). The question of these privileges, mentioned more and more openly by the media, together with inquiries into the condition of the "new poor," crystallized the resentment of the workers, first against the local nomenclatura and then against all the politicians. The catastrophe at Chernobyl, revealing the widespread negligence of the supreme authorities of the country, also made the people aware of the ecological problems created by extensive and poorly organized industrialization, especially in such regions as the Donbas and the Kuzbas.

The first economic reforms, introduced gradually in 1986, added to the confusion occasioned by glasnost. Already, during the Eighteenth Party Congress, certain workers' delegates had spoken of the problems tormenting the working class. The principal one was worker discontent with arbitrary rule and injustice when salaries were reduced as a result of the malfunctioning of the economy as a whole. The first consequence of quality control of all industrial products, which had formerly applied only to the armaments industry, considerably reduced the salaries of millions of workers. Products failing to meet quality standards were no longer "passed," that is, no longer counted in the calculation of bonuses. According to an article in *Sovetskaia Rossia* (January 12, 1987), 68 percent of the workers in the enterprises in which the investigation had been made (metallurgy, mines) had had wage cuts of fifty to seventy-five rubles per month (on an average wage of two hundred to three hundred rubles). Another complaint was that, after 1986, both salary and bonus scales had been revised, causing immediate reduction of earnings for many categories of workers. Despite all the talk about the "financial autonomy" or even "self-management" of enterprises, all decisions clearly continued to be imposed by the bureaucracy—though it was constantly denounced in the press as being "anti-perestroika." A series of investigations carried out by the Institute of the International Workers' Movement (IMRD) and by the newly formed All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTSIOM) confirms the increase of worker discontent during the two years preceding the social revolt in the summer of 1989.

Discontent focused not so much on questions of pay as on the organization of the whole production process: the interruption of supplies to enterprises, the worn-out machines, the misuse of production capacities, and so on. These phenomena, which penalize workers insofar as all the economic reforms introduced under perestroika aim to make workers' wages dependent on their individual output, are of course ascribed to the "conservative elements of the economic and political authorities," suspected of conspiring to discredit the efforts of the reformers. Thousands of letters addressed by workers or workers' organizations to the press (especially in the first two years of perestroika) speak not only of the worsening of working conditions but of the general deterio-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ration of bureaucratic management and of conflicts with the administration, accused of "sabotaging perestroika." They protest obstructions by the party, the trade-union apparatus, and the "parasites living at the workers' expense." The workers present themselves as the "best defenders, the guarantors of the success of perestroika," fighting the "conservative forces." At the same time, they object to the introduction of economic reforms into enterprises and, in particular, the development of work brigades, which "diminishes the cohesion and collective solidarity of the workers of the same workshop." Reforms, they argue, are acceptable only where "real workers' control over the whole of the production system exists."

Thus the drive for reform in the years 1986 to 1989 had two results. It led, first, to radicalization of the political opposition against those designated by both the newly freed press and the reformers as "conservatives" (in the eyes of the workers, this group included the administration, the party, and trade-union officials); and, second, to strong resistance against the introduction of economic reforms. Nevertheless, the percentage of those who thought it necessary to reform the politico-economic system as a whole increased from 20 percent to over 35 percent between the beginning of 1988 and the summer of 1989, highest among the most skilled workers, and in the thirty to forty age group.

From 1988 onward, the world of Soviet labor was faced with an entirely new problem: unemployment. In December 1987, N. Kostakov, assistant director of the Gosplan Research Institute, was reported in the journal *Sovetskaia Kultura* and in all the Soviet media as saying that some two million workers had been "temporarily released" since 1985. In the next ten years, "frictional unemployment" (the period between losing one job and changing to another) was likely, if a realistic labor policy was adopted, to affect between fourteen and nineteen million people.

Several surveys carried out by IMRD illustrate the attitude to unemployment taken by the Soviet population. Workers readily admit that they do not work to the maximum of their ability, and that a surplus of labor exists. For all this, 85 percent consider it unacceptable to dismiss workers. They consider it useless to work beyond a certain limit: why should one work more, depriving others of work, especially as we get no more money for doing so? And if we do get a few dozen rubles more, of what use are they if they buy nothing anyway? Workers, concludes the sociologist V.E. Gimpelson, are deeply attached to an economic philosophy incompatible with the development of a market economy. This "economic philosophy," he explains, is based on the guarantee of stable prices, low salaries ("guaranteed poverty"), a very small pay range, numerous free services, little incentive to work, and a general shortage of consumer goods.

The IMRD surveys also reveal other interesting facts: 87 percent of the workers favor reducing the number of people employed in economic management and in the administration; 30 percent admit that a "certain amount of unemployment can be allowed in general." And, lastly, 25 percent, if dismissed, would be prepared to work in the private sector. Gimpelson concludes that there is a long way to go before the adoption of a "new economic philosophy" (with realistic and fluctuating prices, differentiated and higher wages, controlled levels of unemployment, and a market without lines or bribery). There is, nonetheless, a minority of workers (25 percent to 30 percent?), most of them young and skilled, who are prepared to face the challenge of the switch to a market economy.

The Miners' Strike

During the years 1986 to 1988, there were reports in the press, for the first time, of strikes in some twenty enterprises, including the Kamaz lorry works at Brezhnev and the bus drivers at Chekhov and Kichinev. The most important strikes were those at the bus factories at Likino and at the Diesel motor factory at Jaroslavl (December 1987). In May 1987, Moscow television showed pictures of a strike in a Moscow factory: the workers were protesting against deplorable hygienic conditions and the numerous accidents at work. After seventy years, during which the working class theoretically wielded supreme power,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only a small minority of workers (9 percent) believed that strikes were "a normal method of dealing with labor conflicts." As one of the leaders of the strike committees in the Donbas was to say, at the end of 1989, "[T]he proverbial patience of the Russian workers must really have been exhausted for the workers to have overcome their psychological aversion to strikes. . . ."

There was, thus, widespread surprise when, within ten days, the strike that began on July 10, 1989 in the Cheviakov mine, near the small town of Mejdurechens, spread to over two hundred mines and enterprises in the industrial basin in the Kemerovo region (Kuzbas) and then to the mines of the Donbas, involving between three hundred and four hundred thousand workers. The range of demands and the coordination of the strike were, indeed, surprising. The strikers were voicing their protest against living and working conditions of another age: in addition to demands for higher wages, at a moment when inflation had caused prices to rise by more than 50 percent since the beginning of 1989, the miners concentrated on details that were an eloquent indication of their abject misery. They were asking, for instance, for the allocation of a piece of soap per week, the provision of hot meals at the canteen, for state shops to stock supplies of basic products. Many of their demands concerned the question of privileges and social injustice. They denounced cheating by the administration, trade unions, and party officials in the distribution of bonuses, lodgings, and holiday vouchers. There was a great deal of indignation about the privileges enjoyed by the nomenclatura. In a region where infant mortality reached a record figure (10 percent of Novokuznetsk), the existence of "closed" clinics was a provocation.

A team of sociologists, sent into the field by the All-Russian Center for the study of Public Opinion (VTSIOM), interrogated several thousand workers. Fifty-three percent of them replied that the main reason for the strike was the low standard of living. But 25 percent of the workers complained of the authorities' deplorable attitude toward the people, 17 percent of the catastrophic situation of society as a whole, 15.5 percent of conflicts with the local authorities, and 10 percent of a general loss of confidence in the system. In its address to the people, precisely entitled "The Confidence Crisis," the First Conference of representatives of the strike committees of the Kuzbas explained that the real reason for the strike was neither the drop in the standard of living nor the deterioration of the ecological situation but the loss of confidence in all authorities—political, economic, professional, and trade union—when the problems were becoming more acute daily. In this situation, the strikers proposed that a certain number of general measures be taken, some of them contradictory, such as closing cooperatives in the nonproductive sector, while giving enterprises more economic autonomy and the right to control a part of their production; reducing the powers of the central economic authorities; and—most important of all—giving the workers control of their production in accordance with the right of every individual to enjoy the fruits of his or her labor, an essential prerequisite for guaranteeing social justice in all spheres of life.

From the beginning of the strike the local authorities lost control of the situation. The strikers, as is clear from the VTSIOM survey, had confidence only in their own strike committees (80.8 percent). The peoples' deputies, elected four months earlier, enjoyed the confidence of only 14 percent of the strikers, the head of the CPSU (Gorbachev) 6 percent; the local party committee—0 percent! And, finally, 12 percent of the workers declared that they could count on no one. In fact, the strike, as shown by L.A. Gordon, revealed that there was a profound distrust—unexpectedly profound—of all existing authorities. As a result, the strike looked, at first, like the embryo of a new power. At the outset, many party militants served on the strike committees. Thus, for instance, 38.5 percent of the members of the strike committees in the Kuzbas, in July–August 1989 were communists. A year later, party members formed only 12.5 percent of the workers in charge of the strike committees. From July 18 onward, representatives of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

several dozen strike committees set up, in Moscow, a "Committee for the Organization of Independent Workers' Movements."

The strike committees, in this way, proclaimed their intention to continue after the end of the strike, and to join forces with labor organizations that had already been set up before the major strikes of the summer of 1989. There were about fifty such organizations, of which the best-known were the workers' club in Sverdlovsk—Yeltsin's home town—formed by students at the university, together with workers from the turbine factory in the same town; and the workers' club of the diesel engine factory in Jaroslavl, which had been set up after a long strike in that factory in 1988. The birth of the organizing committee began the process of institutionalizing the strike committees, which considered themselves the only true "revolutionary" organs capable both of defending workers' rights and of carrying out the reforms introduced under perestroika.

At the beginning, the government agreed to negotiate with these committees in order to stop the strikes (which had lasted, on average, between three and six weeks). The strikers obtained satisfaction on many of their purely economic demands—though most of the promises made by the government were not kept—and, a few months after the strike, the small advantages gained had been whittled away by inflation. But when the government finally drew up a draft law on "Methods for the Settlement of Labor Conflicts," strike committees and other "independent labor organizations" were excluded from the list of organizations legally permitted to organize protest action!

In November 1989 there were new strikes in another coal-mining area, where living and working conditions were particularly tough—the Vorkuta region, in the far north. There, the demands put forward by the strike committees, which had been formed immediately, were of a very radical political character. In addition to issues of pay and of giving the miners greater autonomy under workers' control, the strikes "wage[d] the struggle for the liquidation of the bureaucratic and administrative machinery." The strike committees demanded the abrogation of the "Brezhnev Constitution" of 1977, "the recognition of the right to pluralism," "independent trade unions and social organizations," "free access to all information, the right and resource to bring out independent newspapers and publications."

The surveys made by the sociologists sent to investigate the situation reported that the strike movement had become far more radical than in the summer. Remembering the government's failure to keep the promises made to their colleagues in the Donbas and the Kuzbas, only 5 percent of the miners of Vorkuta signaled their confidence in the traditional institutions. As for striking, 75 percent of the miners now considered it "a right as important as any other kind of freedom." The sociologists concluded that

> the worker groups are so highly politicized that there can be no question of isolating and eliminating the ringleaders. The best way of channeling off their discontent would be by giving the ringleaders another means of action: arrangements could be made, for instance, for the strike committees to help in solving the general problems of the town or region, or participate in the work of the existing social organizations or Soviets. . . . Similarly, now that the workers' committees, through participating in the management of the mines, have acquired a certain autonomy, their energy could be directed to constructive ends.

When these "guidelines" were given, the workers' committees had, in many instances, already taken over the functions of the local Soviets, which had lost control of the situation. At Vorkuta, the strike committee had called for the formation of a new Soviet elected by a show of hands and composed, in the words of the committee, "of persons honest enough to enjoy the confidence of the miners, devoted enough to the cause and audacious enough to be reasonable."

The New Labor Organizations

While several tens of thousands of miners from the Vorkuta basin were on strike, the first labor union at a regional level was established on November 18, 1989 at Kemerovo, the capital

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the Kuzbas. This union, the "Union of the Workers of the Kuzbas," which came into existence during the fourth conference of labor committees of the Kemerovo region, indicated how much progress had been made since the summer. Such committees had come into being not only in enterprises where strikes had been organized but also in many which had not. These committees had replaced the old trade union bodies, in some cases taking over functions formerly exercised by the Soviets.

A new generation of worker activists, composed of ordinary workers or former trade union or party officials now gone into opposition, emerged, with such figures as N. Boldyrev or S. Vassiliev, the leaders of the labor movement in the Donbas, who had been punished in former years for their premature attempts to democratize the leadership of the enterprise.

The program of the "Union of Kuzbas Workers" favored a multiparty system and "the democratization of public life." The Soviets, harking back to the myth of a golden age of Soviet democracy, were to be the organs of a truly popular power; and the aim of the Union was to "accelerate the process of perestroika insofar as the existing institutions were not capable of taking radical measures to overcome the forces of conservatism and reaction." The praise of a market economy was greeted with considerable surprise, being regarded by many as due to the influence of "democratic forces" outside the labor movement. The market economy, according to the program, represented an immense achievement for world civilization, while the absence of a market economy had been a great loss for the Soviet economy. Nevertheless, the Union deemed it necessary to explain: "The market plus planned organization, the great discovery of the twentieth century, should settle the relations between enterprises."

In the course of the winter of 1989 to 1990, dozens of other labor unions were formed, even in places not affected by the strike movement. The most important ones included the "Union of the Workers of Gorlovka," the "Vorkuta Democratic Labor Movement," the labor unions of Briansk, Minsk, and Petrozavodsk, the "Independent Syndicate" of Perm, and so on. Although a number of these proclaimed aims similar to those of the "Union of the Workers of the Kuzbas," others, belonging to the "Workers' United Front" (OFT) held diametrically opposite views. The United Front, which was formed of hundreds of organizations (particularly in the industrial centers of Central Russia) was of the opinion that "the development of a market economy must inevitably accentuate the economic crisis in which the country was plunged." The "neo-Bolshevik" program of the OFT struck out indiscriminately against a variety of targets: the cooperatives, for "sucking the blood of the workers"; the press and the media in general over which the OFT wished to exercise strict "worker control"; the social differentiation created by a market economy; "black marketeers and parasites"; drugs and sex; and foreign and "cosmopolitan" influences.

The success of the OFT in certain enterprises, encouraged surreptitiously by conservative elements of the party, indicates that some of its ideas were supported by the workers, disoriented both by political developments and especially by the economic crisis. According to a survey made in September 1989, most of the new recruits of the OFT were semiqualified workers and "second-generation" manual workers (to use Gordon and Komarovski's classification) attached to the values of the "era of developed socialism," irritated with the "debauch of democracy" engendered by glasnost. Thus, only a few months after the rebirth of a workers' movement in the Soviet Union, it had become the scene of political clashes between conservatives and radicals, even though it meant to be completely nonpolitical, strictly a labor movement.

As pointed out in numerous publications of workers' committees, the movement had great difficulty, from the outset, in defining its relations with the intellectuals and the "democratic forces." After being founded, originally, on profound mistrust (less than 1 percent of the Donbas miners on strike in the summer of 1989 had faith in the movement "Democratic Russia"), the relations between the two rapidly became more friendly through the intervention of Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin had, from the very beginning of perestroika, posed as an enemy of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

privileges, a "genuine proletarian leader," a product of the Urals's working class. This image of the "rebel against the system" very soon won over a part—the most dynamic part—of the Soviet working masses.

The year 1990 was marked by the persistence and extension of the labor movement. The strikes were less spectacular than in 1989, but they involved more people (1.6 million strikers as against 600,000 in 1989) in 124 industrial centers (excepting the Baltic Republics, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, where the central authorities had ceased to keep an account of movements and strikes inspired mainly by nationalistic considerations). These strikes were mostly short (lasting a few days) because the administration quickly promised to improve working conditions and raise wages—which did not, however, solve the problems, because even when wages were raised, the increases were quickly absorbed by inflation.

And shortages spread. Thus the main result of the strikes, apart from disorganizing production, was to institutionalize hundreds of "strike committees," which tended to replace the official trade unions and party committees. In the face of the "sabotage" of the ministerial bureaucracy, the growing power void, the rupture of the economic apparatus, and the breakdown of authority, the solution recommended by these committees was to create a sort of self-management, based on the autonomy of enterprises (officially encouraged by the reformers) and "worker control."

In May 1990, the first pan-Russian congress of workers' organizations, held at Novokuznetsk, founded the "Labor Confederation," representing several hundred workers' committees. The text drawn up at the end of several weeks of debate, in which a number of selected representatives of the "democratic forces" were invited to participate, described the labor movement as the sole "organized social body capable of preventing the conservatives from returning to power." The time of reforms "from above" was past. The central power had demonstrated its inability to cope and no longer enjoyed the confidence of the people. The Soviets and genuine democratic people's organizations, such as the workers' committees, must therefore become the organs of real people's power. They alone could put an end to the exploitation of the people by the state, the nomenklatura, and the technocracy. Significantly, the declaration devoted far more space to criticism of party monopoly, privileges, and so on—that is, to political rather than economic questions. The delegates were not unanimous, since they varied in status according to the enterprises they represented. The workers' committees in enterprises threatened with closure or reconversion (factories belonging to the Byelorussian military-industrial complex, for instance, or unprofitable mines in the Donbas) were naturally less enthusiastic about an uncontrolled change to a market economy.

The Politicization of the Labor Movement

These hesitations became obvious in the course of the first and second congresses of miners, held in June and December 1990. The problem was how to reconcile worker control, self-management, a market economy, technocratic principles, and the social protection of workers threatened with reconversion. In the course of the second congress, it was clear that the delegates were being gradually converted to the idea of a market economy. Meantime, the majority of "independent workers" organizations had declared themselves in favor of the economic reforms drawn up by the Russian government—the "Yeltsin Plan," which provided specifically for the freeing of prices, a decrease of production, and the closure of a large number of unproductive enterprises. This plan was an alternative to the more cautious and progressive plan presented by the Soviet Prime Minister N. Ryjkov, which was adopted by the Soviet government.

From that time onward (autumn 1990), the leaders of the worker movement sided with Yeltsin against Gorbachev. Both the second pan-Russian miners' congress and the "Labor Confederation" demanded, in particular, that enterprises be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Russian republic. As the conflict between Gorbachev and Yeltsin hardened, many observers remarked that the workers' committees, influenced by the "democrats," had "swung

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too far to the left," and that the base was not yet ready for the Yeltsin Plan. Failure of the appeal to the workers' organizations to strike against the repression in the Baltic states (January 1991) showed that the working class could not be mobilized in defense of all the causes defended by the "democrats."

Nonetheless, owing to the resentment with which the most highly politicized elements of the workers viewed the privileges enjoyed by the nomenklatura (aggravated by the economic crisis, for which Gorbachev was held responsible), the workers' organizations tended increasingly to side with Yeltsin. The president of the Russian Congress was regarded more and more—as described in the "Appeal to Worker Groups," made on February 26, 1991 by the Workers' Committees of the Kuzbas, at a time of extreme tension in the relations between Gorbachev and Yeltsin—as the sole alternative to the return to power of the reactionary forces. Without political freedom, no economic problem could be solved. The Soviet of the Kuzbas Workers' Committees, supported by a large number of the Donbas workers' organizations, therefore called for a general strike on the first of March. While the main demands continued to be economic (the doubling of wages in anticipation of the next price rise, scheduled for April 2, and higher pensions), the character of the strike was highly political. For instance, the miners called for the resignation of Gorbachev and of the federal government, and the dissolution of the Congress of Deputies of the USSR, "whose political views were out of date." They also called for the nationalization of the party's property, the adoption of a multiparty system, and a change in the organization of enterprises and government based on the party system. Such a transformation had, in fact, already begun. In hundreds of enterprises, workers' committees had driven out local party organizations and taken over their premises. The "new generation" of workers' leaders were far more radical than those emerging from the strikes in the summer of 1989. In less than two years, considerable changes had taken place. In this democracy, where voting is by show of hands, only 2 percent of the workers' committee leaders were party members. The workers were violently critical of the staff of the KGB cells set up in enterprises (the infamous "personnel sections"). In many factories, "referendums" were organized for expulsion of the party committees. "Every communist [says the text of a tract circulated by the Mejdurechensk workers' committee] is free, like every other member of a civilized political party, to spend some time on politics, if he so wishes, out of working hours and away from his place of work; but during working hours, he is required to contribute, like all other workers, to the national wealth!"

A further demand was that all enterprises should be placed under the jurisdiction of the republican authorities, and that the enterprise should be allowed to sell part of its production directly and share the profits with the workers. Thus, the old demand for "worker control," in the sense, is paralleled by Yeltsin's assertion of the sovereignty of the Russian republic.

During the month of March 1991 alone, over 540 enterprises (about 500,000 workers) went on strike, mostly in the mining regions of the Donbas and Kuzbas, which were always in the forefront of the movement. Action became more widespread at the beginning of April after the federal government had, on April 2, introduced a sharp increase of retail prices (an average of 200 percent). On April 13, dozens of enterprises in Minsk went on strike. The following day, over a hundred thousand workers occupied the center of the town, demanding "market economy prices, market economy wages" and the resignation of Gorbachev and the Pavlov government, "puppets of the CPSU, a party which has brought the country to ruin and is now clinging to power." The strikers also demanded the nationalization of all the properties of the Communist party of Byelorussia, to be transferred to a fund to help the victims of the Chernobyl disaster, "and to improve health and education services for the exploited working masses." The "Byelorussian Strike Committee," set up on April 13, drew up a list of the workers' demands including, in addition to those listed above, "the abolition of all privileges . . . the abolition of the KGB . . . the recognition of the right to individual ownership of land . . . the dissolution of the Parliament of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Byelorussia . . . the holding of free elections under a multiparty system . . . the elimination of the party cells in enterprises and government establishments."

Gorbachev's visit to Minsk, for the purpose of praising the legendary patience of the Byelorussian people, did not of course put an end to the strike, which, like most of the other strikes, in the coal basin in particular, lasted until the end of May 1991.

Despite the proposed increases in wages—which made little difference in view of inflation—the workers were particularly incensed by the placing of enterprises under the jurisdiction of the Republican authorities and the fact that enterprises were given the right, "subject to worker control," to dispose of the part of the production that had been freely sold, even abroad. The situation was saved by the agreement reached between Gorbachev and Yeltsin at Novo-Ogarievo, putting an end, temporarily, to the principal workers' strikes. By the first three months of 1991 these strikes had affected more than three million workers in the three republics of Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine alone.

In the course of the past two years, the workers' movement, increasingly radical politically, yet still hesitating on how to abandon an economic system that condemns workers to "guaranteed" poverty, has made an important contribution to the breakdown of the traditional institutions and authorities. It now remains to be decided how to achieve unity and what general policy to adopt—an extremely difficult decision in view of the problems involved. What new economic culture can be created, for instance, in view of the passivity of many worker groups that have to be pushed into action? With the conservatives having been eliminated after the failure of the coup d'état of August 19–21, during which the active, politicized working class sided unequivocally with the resistance and the party committees were pushed out of enterprises, what enemy remains? The central power? Management? The new technocrats, already denounced for their "inhumanity" toward the working class as soon as they begin to talk about cutting staff? How can they accept—and make others accept—the sacrifices entailed by the switch to a market economy? How reconcile a market economy with self-management? What is better, to become a trade union in a post-communist society or, in the next free elections, to stand as a workers' party?

These questions will no doubt have to be solved by the movement of the class that had once been "the hegemonic class of developed socialism."

POSTSCRIPT: According to the latest reliable statistics, there were only 350,000 strikers (in industry) in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus between July 1991 and June 1992. How is this shrinkage of the protest movement to be explained?

In the first place, many of the political demands of the workers' movements have been satisfied. The Communist party presence in enterprises has been eliminated, the KGB has been disbanded, and enterprises have been placed under the jurisdiction of the various republics. The breakup of the USSR into a number of independent states led to the dispersal of the worker units set up so laboriously during the period 1989–1991. Consequently, the miners of the Donbass and those of the Kuzbas no longer have a common enemy to hold responsible for their common woes.

Since the fall of 1991, authorities in branches of industry where there had been labor conflicts have made concessions, despite criticisms by many economists, especially government supporters. There have been considerable wage increases and a general reduction of economic pressure. (One recent consequence, however, is inflation, which has been running at 25 to 50 percent a month.) In the space of a few months, miners' wages have increased from 2,000 to 10,000 and even 15,000 rubles a month. (In contrast, salaries of university professors have risen much more slowly, from 1,000 to 1,800 rubles.) Such wage policies, applied in particular in large enterprises where there was social unrest, put a brake on workers' agitation. Staff reductions, leading inevitably to increased unemployment in industry, have so far been postponed due to pressure from the base. In short, most dramatic decisions have been deferred. Instead, the transition to a "market economy" has led to enormous price rises, offset by wage increases in the most vital sectors of industry, and not to massive labor cuts. The crucial question—that of the increase of productivity—has not yet been faced. But everyone is aware that the worst is yet to come.

At a time when important policy decisions have to be made, the workers' committees, movements, and "coordinating" groups are more divided than ever. Localism is rampant, and centrifugal tendencies are stronger than ever, especially in Russia. No party or trade union has emerged on a national scale out of the multitude of workers' organizations set up between 1989 and 1991. Some intellectuals interpret this as proof that the unlettered masses are incapable of organizing and promoting any real civic spirit. But this is a stage of transition. The future of the "hegemonic class of developed socialism" is yet to be seen.

Translated by ALINE WERTH □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frank Roosevelt

MARX AND MARKET SOCIALISM

Karl Marx ruled out any role for the market in a post-capitalist economy. "Within the cooperative society based on common ownership of the means of production," he wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, "the producers do not exchange their products." Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engels, stated their position (in *Anti-Düring*) even more bluntly: "The seizure of the means of production by society puts an end to commodity production . . . [and at that point the market is to be] replaced by conscious organization on a planned basis."

Today, however, many democratic socialists are moving, both in theory and in practice, toward allowing markets a significant role. "Market socialism" is coming to be seen as a feasible way of implementing socialist values within an efficient economic system and, hence, as a chance to revive the socialist project in the face of nearly universal disenchantment with the orthodox model of central planning and state ownership.

The movement toward the market is not without some real problems for socialists. There is a strong possibility that markets will make it difficult or impossible to achieve some of the defining goals of socialism.[1] Although the market socialist critique of Marx must be taken seriously—I, for one, have come to reject his abolitionist position—it is still necessary to pay careful attention to Marx's argument. He exposed many of the defects of capitalist markets that will not just disappear with the establishment of market socialism.

This article is a revised version of an essay that is forthcoming in *Economics as Worldly Philosophy: Essays on Political and Historical Economics in Honor of Robert Heilbroner*, edited by Ronald Blackwell, Jaspal S. Chatha, and Edward J. Nell (London: Macmillan & Company, 1992). While retaining sole responsibility for the views expressed here, the author wishes to thank Joanne Barkan, David Belkin, Samuel Bowles, Mitchell Cohen, Philip Harvey, Irving Howe, and Jinx Roosevelt for helpful comments on earlier drafts. © Copyright 1992 by Frank Roosevelt.

The Critique of Marx

The first task is to review the main criticisms lodged by market socialists against Marx. Why is the goal of abolishing markets simply not feasible? To begin with, there is the inescapable fact that there are only two known ways, broadly speaking, in which the economic activities of a modern society can be organized and coordinated—one being the market, and the other, some form of political process (that is, planning). Before advocating the elimination of either option, one should be reasonably certain that the other will work. Yet Marx does not seem to have thought this through. Take, for example, the well-known passage in *The German Ideology* in which he and Engels criticize the capitalist division of labor and project a future communist society in which a person could "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, [and] criticize after dinner. . . ." For Marx, the freedom to change occupations was linked to the organization of the economy. Under communism, "society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow . . . ." The problem is that Marx and Engels neglect to explain *who* is to represent "society" and *how* the "regulation of production" is to be accomplished in a way that allocates resources efficiently.

A great many writers over the years have pointed to the difficulty—or even impossibil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ity—of effectively structuring a modern economy without relying on markets. In an unpublished paper, market socialist theorist David Belkin has recently offered a list of the more common problems that became pervasive in many of the former communist countries that tried to eliminate the market: bureaucratic domination of production and social life; resources tied up in obsolete investments; prices unrelated to costs, hence distorted allocation of resources; goods and services in chronic short supply; slow growth in real incomes; disguised unemployment, for example, people in unproductive jobs; poor motivation and work discipline; little reward for attending to environmental considerations. Although many of these problems are also prominent in capitalist countries, the point is that they remained in societies that claimed to have found an economic system superior to capitalism. At least one reason why the "socialism" instituted in Eastern Europe did not outperform capitalism was the mistaken idea, inspired by Marx, that the market could simply be abolished.

Furthermore, even if the vision of a marketless communist economy were applicable, it is only in a small and relatively simple society. It is just not an effective way to organize and coordinate the economic activities of a large and complex nation—much less the whole world. Once the market is eliminated, the allocation of economic resources has to be accomplished through some form of political process. In a relatively small and simple society (for example, an Israeli kibbutz), the political process can also be simple. Decisions about what to produce, how to produce it, and so on, can be arrived at without reference to market-determined prices because everyone involved in decision making can have direct knowledge of the relative costs of producing different things, and the preferences of the members of the community for various possible outputs will also be known. Assigning different tasks to specific people—achieving an acceptable "division of labor"—and motivating everyone to do their work well can also be accomplished.

In contrast, in large and complex societies, collection of essential information becomes more difficult. Motivation also becomes a problem, and the political process necessarily becomes more complex as direct democracy ceases to be an option. Inevitably, a subset of the population is selected by some method to gather information and to make production and resource-allocation decisions. Impersonal mechanisms must be put in place to motivate people to perform the necessary tasks and to distribute the output of the economy. Information may be closely held or widely shared, and the procedures for making decisions at various levels may be more or less democratic. Still the fact remains that, in a large and complex economy, not everything can be done by everybody. The selection of those who perform the more important tasks and the methods by which this selection is accomplished necessarily become vital issues. A question arises as to what social interests those selected—the planners, politicians, bureaucrats—will actually represent. Is it likely that these "agents" will be able to, or even wish to, represent the interests of the "principals"—that is, the population as a whole? If not, how can the goals of socialism be achieved in a marketless society?

It is noteworthy that in the same sentence in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* in which Marx banished commodity exchange from communist society, he asserted that "now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labor no longer exists in an indirect fashion but [exists] directly as a component part of the total labor." This rather mysterious statement builds on the first chapter of *Capital*, where there is a rough sketch of the economic organization of "a community of free individuals carrying on their work with the means of production in common. . . ." Marx argues that we can analyze the economic tasks of a socialist society in essentially the same way that we think about those of a single, isolated individual—Robinson Crusoe—only "with this difference, that they are social, instead of individual." But can we really think of a complex economy in this way? Marx's yearning for a marketless society (exemplified in the purest form by the Robinson Crusoe story) seems to have blinded him to the many difficulties involved in moving from the analysis of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one-person economy to the modeling of a multifaceted socialist economy.

Marx does allude (in the same passage) to one of the central problems of a socialist economy when he asserts that the "apportionment [of labor-time] in accordance with a definite social plan, maintains the proper proportion between the different kinds of work to be done [on the one hand] and the various wants of the community [on the other]." Indeed, one can judge the effectiveness of any economic system by asking how well it achieves this "proper proportion." In none of his discussions of a postcapitalist economy, however, does Marx ever take up the question of whether or not a centrally planned socialist economy—one that bans markets—actually can allocate the "different kinds of work to be done" in such a way as to provide effectively for the "various wants of the community." He simply assumes that this will be possible. Considering the widespread dissatisfaction today with centrally planned economies, this appears to have been an unwarranted assumption.

So what is the problem? Why is it not possible for a socialist economy to replace the market with planning? Another perspective on this question is supplied by Alec Nove's discussion of "the *ex ante* illusion" in *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*. This is the idea that the needs and wants of a community can somehow be determined before production takes place, thereby allowing production itself to be undertaken in a precise way to provide exactly the goods and services that the community wants. If things could actually be done this way, and done effectively, it would certainly eliminate a good deal of the waste that occurs in a market economy—where some resources are employed to produce things that nobody buys, and others are used just to persuade people to buy things that they may not need.

However, as Nove points out, there are several fundamental problems with this conception of a planned economy. One has to do (again!) with collecting the necessary information from the population regarding, say, the preferred design and size of shoes, in advance of production. Some people (myself included) do not know exactly what style and size shoe they want until they actually enter a shoe store, look around, and try on a number of different pairs. This way of allowing consumers to express (and form) their preferences is available only in a market economy, and the validation of the allocation of social labor occurs only *ex post*. In other words, one can only know whether or not society's labor-time was allocated "properly" *after* consumers have made their purchasing decisions. Inevitably, the shoes (or other items) that do not get purchased will represent wasted resources.

Even if all of the necessary information about consumers' preferences could somehow be obtained in advance of production, it is far from sure that precisely the desired quantities and qualities of products will be produced. If, for some reason, producers do not turn out precisely the quantity and quality of goods and services that the community wants, what recourse does the community have—either individually or collectively—to correct the production process?

Whatever its many deficiencies, a market economy provides consumers with choices and it can also give producers incentives to produce what consumers (or other producers) want.[2] A market economy makes possible the decentralization of production decisions and it allows prices to be established that, however roughly and imperfectly, reflect the relative scarcities of the available resources both in relation to each other (for example, wood, coal, water power, land, labor, machinery) and in relation to consumer preferences. If there is a workable degree of competition in the economy (that is, relatively little monopoly or monopsony power [where a single buyer confronts many small suppliers]), these prices can serve as signals that not only transmit information about relative scarcities, production possibilities, and consumer preferences but also provide incentives for efficient production.

When Marx looked at the market and its corresponding money relations, he primarily saw their negative and mystifying effects on people. He failed to see that markets can also organize production in a way that allows

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

resources to be used effectively to satisfy people's needs. Moreover, as Barnard College economist Deborah Milenkovitch has argued, market-determined prices are a necessary condition for popular sovereignty. It is only with the information provided by such prices that the citizens of highly complex modern societies can evaluate alternative public policies.

There is, however, one assumption that, if accurate, would permit us to ignore all of the problems entailed in Marx's proposal to abolish the market. That is the assumption of abundance. If everything were plentiful (including natural resources and capital goods) and if—as a result of advances in technology—human labor were many times more productive than it is today, then we would not have to worry about social priorities or concern ourselves with allocating scarce resources effectively. Rather, we could enjoy a state of affairs in which efficiency would be relatively unimportant and virtually all social needs could be easily satisfied.[3]

This appears to have been assumed in *The Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels observe that "the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production." With admiration they note that "during its rule of scarce one hundred years, the bourgeoisie has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together." In Marx's view of history, it was the specific mission of the bourgeoisie to raise productivity to such a high level that an age of abundance could be inaugurated—an age in which scarcity and its attendant conflicts over goods and resources would be left behind. Indeed, in *The German Ideology*, which Marx wrote with Engels shortly before they wrote the *Manifesto*, there was an explicit reference to "a great increase of productive power, a high degree of its development" as a precondition for communist society: "[T]his development of [the] productive forces . . . is an absolutely necessary practical premise [for the communist revolution] because without it *want* is merely made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced."

Thus, in Marx's view, communist society would not have to wrestle with "the economic problem" but could pursue its goals in an environment of plenty. Yet how realistic is this assumption in today's world—one in which most of the population is still poor, and in which the effort to bring everyone's standard of living up to that of the average person in the already industrialized countries is probably not ecologically feasible? Given present realities, embracing Marx's assumption of abundance seems naive at best and, if one takes into account ecological constraints on further industrialization, irresponsible. An alternative approach would accept the continued presence of scarcity and would explore ways in which socialist societies might share its burdens while pursuing growth in ways that would be both equitable and ecologically sustainable.

Marx's Critique of Markets

Was Marx simply naive? He spent a lifetime trying to analyze the market—did he really misunderstand it? That would be simplistic and misleading. Marx arrived at his rejection of the market as the logical outcome of his critique of capitalism. If market socialists are right, the major defects of our existing market economy can be remedied by altering its capitalist framework. But if Marx's critique of capitalist markets applies to markets per se, whatever their institutional setting, market socialists will have to find ways of counteracting those undesirable tendencies of markets that will persist even in a socialist framework. This is why we need to pay attention to Marx's critique.

One of Marx's most forceful criticisms is that capitalism exacerbates economic inequalities and necessarily pits people organized in social classes against each other. Anyone familiar with his analysis of the origins of capitalism will recall his account of how, in Britain, the division of society into capitalists and workers occurred as a result of the historical process of "primitive accumulation." There is, however, another argument in *Capital* that holds that "commodity production, *in accordance with its own inherent laws*, develops further [as soon as some people begin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

selling their productive capacities to others] into capitalist production." (Emphasis added.) It seems obvious to me that Marx was right about the inherent tendency of markets to generate inequality. Even if we could (somehow) start with an equal distribution of economic resources, the normal operation of markets themselves would lead, sooner or later, to increasing inequality, to class divisions, and to the well-known capitalist forms of domination and exploitation. If we are to retain the socialist goal of a classless society, market socialists will have to devise institutional mechanisms to counteract these tendencies.

A second defect of market economies that Marx brings to our attention is that they are inherently unstable. He argues that *any* market economy will be unstable as long as production decisions are made by individuals or firms without any social coordination. This leaves the economy vulnerable to swings in expectations about the future. When there is an optimistic mood in the air, firms will tend to expand production, hire more workers, and use more inputs until, for one reason or another, the optimism is replaced by pessimism and output rates are cut, workers laid off, and so on. Macro-economic variables—total output, investment, employment, and the like—will tend to fluctuate because of the way in which the micro-economic decisions are made. As a result, a market economy will fail to utilize its human and material resources consistently over time and will not produce the amount of output that might otherwise be created and consumed. With resources often idle at the same time as there are unfulfilled human needs, a market economy can be said to be both irrational and wasteful.

Marx's criticisms of the inequality and instability of a market economy are primarily *economic*. However, his most powerful objections to the market were essentially *moral* arguments. Despite his commitment to "scientific" socialism, he engaged in a profoundly utopian exercise, linking his critique of markets to his vision of how things ought to be in a future society. At the most basic level, Marx's antipathy towards the market was rooted in a profound communitarian impulse. It represented a desire to achieve on a higher level the social solidarity, based on a commonly accepted social ethic, that had prevailed in simpler societies before the appearance of class divisions, the state, and the market (with its impersonal relations of commodity exchange). Running through all of his critiques of capitalism is the idea that markets gradually turn everything into a commodity and, in the process, corrode social values and undermine community. Here the young Marx presents his ethical critique of the market in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

> [With the spread of markets] there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic, and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—when everything, in short, passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to market to be assessed at its truest value.

The same point was made in a famous passage in *The Communist Manifesto* in which Marx and Engels assert that capitalism "has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' " This posture is quite similar to that adopted by moral philosophers ranging from Immanuel Kant to Martin Buber, when they condemn any behavior which uses others in an instrumental fashion or treats human beings as means rather than as ends.

Much of Marx's well-known critique of alienation under capitalism is even more utopian than his analysis of commodification. As Stanley Moore has argued in his important book, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*, the project of overcoming social alienation requires a more radical change than the elimination of capitalist exploitation and is inseparable from Marx's commitment to the goal of a marketless communist society. An unalienated society could only be achieved if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"production for exchange" were to be replaced entirely by "production for use." Not only is such a goal inappropriate to any society other than a very small and self-sufficient one, as Moore points out, it is not consistent with—or justified by—Marx's materialist conception of history since it does not grow out of any historical interaction between the forces and relations of production.

There is, however, one aspect of Marx's analysis of alienation that has important implications for market socialism, namely, the one pertaining to the capitalist way of organizing the work process. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx asks, "What constitutes the alienation of labor?" and goes on to give the following response:

> First, that the work is *external* to the worker, . . . and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work . . . is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs.

Clearly, human labor does not need to be organized as it is under capitalism. Any socialism worthy of the name must humanize the work process. Consequently, one of the most important questions for market socialists is whether—or to what degree—work can be humanized within enterprises that are competing with each other on the market.

Perhaps the most profound of Marx's objections to the market is an argument about the meaning of human freedom. He believed that reliance upon the market to coordinate economic activities prevents a society—and the individuals in it—from achieving freedom in the fullest sense of the word. In order to grasp the complexity of his argument on this point, it is necessary to recall his theory of "commodity fetishism" in *Capital*.[4]

Not long after people begin to exchange their products (commodities) in markets, this process takes on a life of its own. The people who do the exchanging come to see it as something that is independent of and superior to themselves. Using an analogy to the process in which "primitive" people carve a tree into a totem pole and then turn it into an object of worship, Marx called the modern tendency to reify the market "commodity fetishism." Once people attribute "objective" reality to "the forces of supply and demand" (forgetting that they themselves set the process of exchange in motion, that it did not fall from the sky), the "market mechanism" becomes an autonomous power and people lose control over certain very important social decisions (for example, what is to be produced, by what methods, where, and for whom). Indeed, people lose control over the direction of their society and allow crucial social choices to be made without deliberation (through representative bodies, for example) on them. Examples of such choices might include the process and pace of urbanization, choices among alternative technologies, priorities for developing energy sources, and the degree of inequality in the distribution of income and wealth.

Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism was first elaborated at length in *Capital*, but it was anticipated more than twenty years earlier in one striking sentence in *The German Ideology*:

> [As the market develops] . . . trade, which after all is nothing more than the exchange of products of various individuals and countries, rules the whole world through the relation of supply and demand—a relation which, as an English economist says, hovers over the earth like the fate of the ancients, and with *invisible hand* allots fortune and misfortune to men, sets up empires and wrecks empires, causes nations to rise and to disappear—whereas with the abolition of the basis [of trade], private property, with the communist regulation of production (and, implicit in this, the abolition of the alien attitude of men to their own product), *the power of the relation of supply and demand is dissolved into nothing*, and men once more gain control of exchange, production and the way they behave to one another. (Emphasis added.)

Clearly, Marx's conception of freedom went beyond the classical liberal definition that focused on the rights of individuals to express themselves and to make choices without interference by the state. For Marx, individual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

choice and expression do not give a person freedom if he or she has an "alien attitude" toward the market mechanism and is without any power to influence the important social decisions affecting his or her life.

Promoting Socialist Objectives

If market socialists such as myself reject the abolition of markets but find valid insights in Marx's critique of them, what practical conclusions can be drawn concerning the implementation of market socialism? While it is beyond the scope of this essay to lay out a detailed model of a market socialist economy, a few suggestions are in order to indicate how to counteract the undesirable tendencies of markets and promote socialist objectives.

If markets, left to themselves, tend to generate inequality, what institutional mechanisms might counteract this tendency? Policies that rely entirely on income taxes and transfer programs often conflict with people's sense that they have a right to their income whether it derives from their property or from their labor. For this reason, it is necessary to promote a form of social ownership of the means of production that can distribute pretax income more equitably while avoiding the negative consequences of state ownership of property. Models that provide for worker- or community-owned enterprises might accomplish this objective. The greatest challenge is to devise a capital-providing mechanism that can foster the development of such enterprises, and it is especially important that this mechanism itself be socially owned, since private banks and capital markets are major generators of inequality and tend to exacerbate uneven development.

If market economies are inherently unstable, fluctuations in the rate of growth can at least be attenuated by using the kind of "indicative planning" that allows a multitude of economic actors to coordinate their decisions and set target rates of growth while avoiding the undesirable effects of central planning.

To counteract the tendency of a market economy to turn everything into a commodity, conscious efforts would be required to slow down—and eventually reverse—the process of commodification. Explicit boundaries would be drawn around the sphere of the market in order to defend other realms and relationships against its encroachments. Certain goods and services should be provided "free" through the public sector either because citizens have a right to them (for example, police and fire protection, legal services, education, health care) or because they are socially desirable but not likely to be provided by the private sector (for example, infrastructure, job training, public amenities). The expansion of a sector of worker-owned enterprises would in fact restrict the sense in which labor-power itself is a commodity (even though labor markets ought to be retained in order to ensure freedom of occupational choice and promote efficient use of human resources). The purpose of all these efforts to contain the market is ultimately to enable us to fashion and to preserve a social ethic, strengthen community life, and achieve a better balance between competition and cooperation.

Although we cannot expect to eliminate social alienation—because it is just not possible to organize most economic activities on the basis of "production for use"—we certainly can improve the quality of work experience for large numbers of people. This can best be done by promoting worker self-management and strengthening those regulations and workers' rights that ensure healthy and humane working conditions.

For Marx, freedom could not be achieved fully as long as markets dominate economic organization. In his view, wherever there are markets there will also be "commodity fetishism." Even if market socialists do not accept this doctrine, we can learn from Marx not to be intimidated by markets. While we do not seek to eliminate the play of supply and demand, we do refuse to hand over all power to "the market mechanism." Seeking the middle ground, we believe that, under the right conditions, markets can be used to achieve social objectives such as efficient allocation of resources, decentralization of decision making, and satisfaction of consumer needs. Demonstrating our liberation from "commodity fetishism," we would institute an "industrial policy" that would reflect demo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A LEGACY OF IDEAS

A bequest of any size can be of lasting benefit to *Dissent* and help ensure that the ideas and beliefs you hold dear will continue to have a public forum. Our legal name is the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas. We ask you to consider one of the following options:

1. You can leave a specific amount or a particular asset.
   "I bequeath $_____ to the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas."
2. You can leave a specific percentage of your estate.
   "I bequeath _____% of my estate to the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas.
3. You can leave the remainder of your estate.
   "After distributing the specific bequests listed above (to others in your will), I leave the remainder of my estate to the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas."

For more specifics on this or other information on gift planning, feel free to phone or write *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017 (212) 595-3084.

cratically determined priorities and give us some degree of control over the direction in which our society is moving. In this way we would hope to achieve, among other things, a kind of economic progress that would be ecologically sustainable and supportive of less developed nations.

Of course, none of this will be easy. Commensurate, simultaneous progress towards all of these goals is impossible simply because some of the goals actually conflict with each other.[5] For example, democratic decision making at the grass-roots level—say, within enterprises or local communities—may conflict with asserting control over the general direction of society, since achieving the latter objective would require either a society-wide consensus or centralized power. Similarly, one can imagine situations in which efficiency considerations (requiring competition and mobility of labor and capital) might conflict with worker-owned enterprises or stable community life. Nevertheless, we would have a much better chance of achieving most of our objectives if we faced these problems within the context of market socialism rather than capitalism.

The most important lesson we might learn from Marx would be to take seriously his "materialist conception of history." As he wrote in a celebrated passage, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; . . . [rather, they make it] under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past." Abolishing the market would seem to qualify as an effort by people to make history "just as they please." Accepting at least a few of the lessons of the past, we should try to find a way to incorporate the market within a framework that will allow us both to promote economic efficiency and to advance socialist values. □

Notes

[1] For my earlier views on this point, see F. Roosevelt, "Market Socialism: A Humane Economy?" *Journal of Economic Issues* 3 (4), December 1969, pp. 3-20.

[2] As Herbert Gintis has pointed out, the "power to switch" is the basis of whatever "sovereignty" consumers have in any economic system. See Herbert Gintis, "The Power to Switch: On the Political Economy of Consumer Sovereignty," in Samuel Bowles, Richard C. Edwards, and William G. Shepherd, eds., *Unconventional Wisdom: Essays in Honor of John Kenneth Galbraith* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), pp. 65-79.

[3] For an appealing projection of such a state of affairs, see John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: Norton and Company, 1963), pp. 358-373.

[4] For a more extended discussion of this topic, see my "Cambridge Economics as Commodity Fetishism," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Winter 1975.

[5] See David Miller, "A Vision of Market Socialism," *Dissent*, Summer 1991 and my comment on Miller, "Questions About Market Socialism," *Dissent*, Fall 1991.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

James B. Rule

TRIBALISM AND THE STATE

A Reply to Michael Walzer

The bipolar world is gone. The world's states are careening toward some new equilibrium—or so we imagine, for no one can foretell what the new order will be. All that we know for sure is that it won't resemble what went before—and that *nationalism* will count much more than before, both within states and in relations among them.

Nationalism was supposed to be an anachronism in the twentieth century—overwhelmed by the economic bounty and social universalism of the world's "advanced" societies. With the collapse of the Soviet system, these notions join the vast array of once familiar certainties that now appear merely quaint. In the former Soviet empire, the process of political fission has begun. First the breakup of the old Russian empire into constituent national states; next, rebellion within those units, as Ossetians seek independence from Georgians, Russians from Moldavians, ethnic Poles from Lithuanians, and so on. And, should these new rebels make good their claims, will not still smaller units assert themselves against the victors, seeking to secure their own freedom in still smaller units?

In times of uncertainty, when long-centralized systems of coercion lose their grip, people reflexively grasp at ethnic or national identifications, or what passes for them. "What passes for them," because what is perceived as national sentiment may be as much a result of the disarray of states as the cause of it. The collapse of central power is exhilarating for many. But many—often the same people—also find it deeply disturbing. Much of the apparent upsurge of national feeling in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, one suspects, represents a feverish search for a principle that will promise safety in an increasingly menacing political environment.

Nationalism has always been a troublesome issue for the left. Historically, of course, national movements have often been competitors to left politics—seeking to substitute solidarities of race, religion, or ethnicity for those of economic condition. Then, too, a number of the twentieth century's most exquisitely illiberal, indeed, bloodthirsty political movements have been efforts to realize fantasies of national purity.

But even absent all the historical baggage, it is hard to mistake the conflict of principle as applied to current cases. How are we to respond to claims of the special vocations of national, religious, ethnic, or racial groupings to rule over specific peoples and places? From all evidence, such claims are growing more widespread. Not only in Israel, Northern Ireland, and India, but now, too, in Croatia, Myanamar, Rwanda, and on and on. The left can hardly afford to ignore these developments.

Michael Walzer addresses some of these issues in his recent essay on "tribalism" (*Dissent*, Spring 1992). I take much issue with his statement, less for what he says than for the yawning moral and political issues that he skirts. It is easy to applaud impulses like Walzer's for the encouragement of "tribal" solidarities—where the encouragement involves no claims against those not included in such solidarities. But these are the easy cases. The hard questions have to do with what principles, arrangements, and strategies we must adopt when the demands of "tribal" solidarity conflict with other fundamental values. And note: these questions become most acute where those extolling national solidarity seek to appropriate the state as a vehicle for their aspirations.

For the impulses that Walzer brackets as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"tribalism" generally militate, as he seems to acknowledge, toward control over states. And from the appropriation of state power by particular "tribes" grows one of the most malignant fruits of modern politics: the permanent bracketing of those outside "tribal" boundaries as *the wrong kinds of people*—inherently ineligible for full participation in the polity. One would have hoped that any such politics would be intolerable to all thinkers of the left.

The allusive, taken-for-granted language of Walzer's essay is at first simply puzzling. "The left has never understood the tribes," he wistfully avers, as though what constitutes "the tribes" were transparent. The closest he comes to a definition is at the end of his remarks, where he describes tribalism as "the commitment of individuals and groups to their own history, culture, and identity." The implication is that all people's identities are bound up with their "commitment" to "their own history." From the rest of the article, one gathers that this means the history of "one's own" ethnic, religious, or national group. But mostly Walzer seems to consider the matter self-evident. We all have our tribes, apparently, and to lose touch with them is to lose identity itself.

I would have thought the truth more banal, more ambiguous. Any sizable population, it would seem, includes people drawn to contrasting particularisms—sub-categories or groupings with which people identify more or less intensely. These range from ties based on religion and ethnicity to those of region, profession, political philosophy, sexual orientation, and on and on. For some people, such identifications are emotional and exclusive; for others, casual and pluralistic. But it is hard to see why religion, ethnicity, or nationality necessarily has, or deserves, any prior or overriding status among all possible attachments. Who can say that being Irish is, or should be, inherently a more basic identification than being gay, or Protestant, or socialist, or disabled?

But that seems to be what Walzer thinks. We are first members of our "tribes," he suggests—and then, possibly, other things, as well. But before we can be any of those other things, we must be secure in our "tribal" identities. "When my parochialism is threatened," he writes, "I become wholly, radically parochial."

The more one reflects on this ambiguous remark, the more ominous it seems. Is it intended as a normative statement, as an affirmation of how things ought properly to be? If so, Walzer is telling us that the dictates of "tribal" sentiment must take precedence over other ethical, moral, or political obligations—at least when the "parochialism" of tribal identity is "threatened." Surely such a position ascribes stunning moral and political precedence to the claims of such parochialism, over and against other considerations.

What makes all this particularly perplexing is the central appeal of Walzer's essay—that "the tribes" be allowed to "go their own way," wherever possible, to statehood. "Self-determination for the many different kinds of tribes (nations, ethnic groups, religious communities) is bound to be complicated," he writes. But Walzer evidently holds that the overriding moral claims of tribalism warrant it: "What is at stake is the value of a historical or cultural or religious community and the political liberty of its members."

But the unit in which liberty or democracy is to be pursued here must perforce be the "tribe"; Walzer seems to consider the satisfaction of "tribal" requirements a sine qua non for any form of democracy: "Bring the 'people' into political life and they will arrive, marching in tribal ranks and orders, carrying with them their own languages, historic memories, customs, beliefs, and commitments."

Walzer apparently intends this anodyne language—the depiction of "the tribe" as an indispensable, life-giving, identity-forming facilitator of democracy—to disarm any critical reaction. But the unanswered questions are too compelling to be dismissed: how must democratic and egalitarian thinkers react to evident injustice perpetrated on behalf of "tribal" values? What stance are we to take on clashes between representatives of rival "tribal" claims—as when two or more such groups both insist that a particular territory forms an indivisible element of their tribal patrimony? What measures must we take to make sure that no racial, religious, or ethnic group will be bracketed as "the wrong kind of people"?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In short, how do we react when the logic of "tribal" demands runs a collision course with the demands of justice, equality, or even ordinary decency? Let each tribe live secure in its own destiny, Walzer suggests, and these things will take care of themselves; "tribes" will cease to be intolerant if only they feel no threat from outside. It is a heart-warming notion, and utterly unconvincing. For the fact remains that political life often forces us to choose between condoning cherished customs and aspirations of a particularistic group and elementary justice.

Was the classic Hindu custom of *suttee*—in which widows were expected to cremate themselves alive on their late husbands' funeral pyres—any more morally acceptable, for being an authentic expression of tribal morality? Is the suppression of homosexuality, or atheism, or any number of other particularisms justified, simply because of tribal inspiration handed down from sacred scripture or other age-old lore? And what are we to make of the virtues of "tribalism" when two or more particularisms both interpret their traditions to vest in them exclusive, perhaps God-given rights to control a particular territory or a particular activity, such as the slaughter of cows?

One does not have to go far afield to confront such dilemmas. A few years ago in California, a militant right-wing sect quietly sought to take over one of the remote, sparsely populated mountain counties. They did this by encouraging their members to take up legal residence in the county, which otherwise had few year-round residents and hence few voters. Clearly their impulse aimed at realizing what almost anyone would recognize as a "tribal" vision—apparently including various nativist and racist doctrines, in conjunction with resistance to central government.

Suppose they had prevailed? Would Walzer have wanted to "let them go their own way"? Should they have been permitted to pursue their "tribal" vision, abetted by the instrumentalities of government power? What if they had sought to deny those of the wrong race or religion the option of residing, or even of spending the night in the county? Some localities in the Deep South have enforced such practices, even in recent years. Or what if the new government had sought to do what many national governments have attempted, in defense of "tribal" sympathies: forbidding the public display of any religious symbols other than the established faith? Surely any political vision that fails to reject such injustices simply because they are of "tribal" origin is bankrupt.

The trouble with "tribal" identity is that it so often upholds the specialness of those on the inside by invoking the disparagement of the Almighty against all others—that is, against *the wrong kinds of people*. To be sure, this need not necessarily be the case; but all too often, it is. *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, unfortunately, is not only a Christian doctrine. Perhaps the temptation to draw such ultimately invidious distinctions is inherent in the logic of religion itself. Any doctrine purporting to place believers in touch with the ultimate design of the universe raises questions about those who (seemingly) don't have the sense, or the God-given grace, to recognize revealed truth when they see it.

At best, these invidious themes are downplayed in interpretation, having minimal effect on social practice. When taken seriously, however, their consequences can be harrowing—from forced conversions to forced transfers of population and wars of extermination.

As exponents of political democracy, we perhaps do best to avoid passing judgment on theology or other strictly metaphysical manifestations of "tribal" ideology. What we can do—and must—is to prevent doctrines of tribal superiority from becoming bases for social practice. In particular, we must do everything in our power to prevent the state from becoming the vehicle for implementing visions of ethnic, religious, or national domination. This means that "letting the people go," in Walzer's soothing phrase, will never do, if it means putting state power in the hands of those bent on using it to uphold their own "tribes" against outsiders—that is, against "the wrong kinds of people."

In a moment of characteristically American political bathos during the 1980 presidential campaign, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention declared to a gathering hosting Ronald Reagan: "God does not hear the prayer of a Jew." It was one of those uncontrolled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outcroppings of candor that occasionally enliven American politics by disclosing things widely felt, but mostly suppressed. The sentiment was exquisitely nasty, and undoubtedly a perfectly accurate reflection of some of the feeling underlying Reagan's support. For weeks, politicians, clergy, and miscellaneous pundits scrambled to condemn, to explain, to defend, or to apologize.

The only silver lining was the fact that the sentiments were clearly no part of the American constitutional system. Those who framed the Constitution had the good sense to keep government out of the business of dictating religious positions—and, thereby, to forestall any sort of government-sanctioned efforts against "the wrong kinds of people"—in this case, those whose prayers God is deemed not to hear.

What listening policies the Deity follows in these respects I cannot say. But we all have reason to rejoice that questions of this kind are not matters of public policy in America. Pressures to this end are always enormous. In a world where states remain key arbiters of power, mastery over "one's own" state has come to represent the ultimate chance for "a people" to take control of its own destiny. The trouble is that by making a particular state the vehicle for the aspirations of a particular "people," much harm is apt to be done to all those bracketed as the wrong kind of people.

The litany of justifications for such harm are a testament to the powers of collective rationalization. The disfranchised group may be seen as transients—temporary occupants of the national territory, even if they have nowhere else to go. Or they may be depicted as an upstart historical presence—a people with no "real" history. Or they may be regarded (as with slaves and their descendants in early America) as inherently incapable of assuming the responsibilities of citizenship. Or they may (like Catholics in nineteenth-century America or Jews in many countries today) be considered to hold incompatible loyalties to other powers. The distasteful strand running through all such ideologies is that the people concerned simply do not "belong" in the tribal state—that they are, once again, the wrong kind of people.

What's worse, when the dominant group seeks to portray the identity of the state as isomorphic with its own, the very existence of "the wrong kind of people" is apt to become a scandal and a threat. In India, the presence of Sikhs and Muslims challenges the self-image of those cherishing the notion of a Hindu tribal state. For the Protestants of Northern Ireland, the very idea that Catholics might stand on equal footing calls into question their own national identity. From these sentiments, it is a short, cynical step to denying even the legitimate existence of the wrong kinds of people within the state—and we have statements like Golda Meir's declaration in 1969 on the Palestinians: "They do not exist." Thus the stage is set for unspeakable oppression, ranging from wholesale denial of political rights to outright extermination.

It is through such processes that Israel has become one of the most telling demonstrations of the debacle of tribal domination. Surely there is a lesson to be learned in the evolution of aspirations for a Jewish homeland into plans for extending Jewish supremacy to all areas dictated by tribal doctrine—especially as these doctrines fan the flames of tribal ideologies among Israel's immediate neighbors. Even among Israel's most liberal apologists, few can contemplate any vision of Israel that does not severely penalize the country's wrong kinds of people.

Consider current debates over the terms under which immigrants from the former Soviet Union are to be instated in Israel. Israeli spokespersons at many points in that political spectrum characterize the aim of the exercise in terms that Walzer himself has used: "the humanitarian purpose of absorbing hundreds of thousands of new immigrants." In other words, a direct response to self-evident human needs. But, of course, the needs being reckoned are only those of people falling within tribal boundaries. Wherever in Israel the immigrants ultimately reside, their arrival can only further diminish the life chances of the indigenous Palestinians. This severe inequality is built into the logic of the tribal state. For the Palestinians, unlike Jews, there is no "law of return"—no matter how deep the identifications or how long the family histories linking people to Haifa, Jerusalem, or Nazareth. As the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right kind of people exercise the option of returning to Israel, Palestinians will be lucky to hold onto what is theirs now. They are the quintessential wrong kind of people.

It ought to give pause.

"The materialist interpretation of history," wrote Weber in a famous passage, "is no cab to be taken at will." The same has to be said for egalitarian and democratic political ideas. Basic to any such perspective, I would have thought, is the assumption that no "tribe," however we understand the term, can be held morally superior to any other. And insofar as we believe these things, we cannot support states predicated on the domination of particular racial, ethnic, religious, or national groupings over others.

None of this means that nationalism, ethnic solidarity, or other forms of group particularism should be rejected as elements of a vigorous civil society. It would be a bizarre world—and not a very attractive one—in which people felt no special affinities for particular categories of their fellow citizens. The task of the left is not to minimize or undermine these ties but to see to it that they never become bases for systematic cruelty or exclusion from public life. We have to reject racial, ethnic, religious, and national chauvinism in all their forms, wherever they surface in social practice. This means doctrines of group domination ranging from apartheid and the white man's burden to Manifest Destiny—and all other notions of unique racial, ethnic, and national vocations to rule over particular peoples and places.

Instead, the left can do two positive things. First, conceive and encourage the practice of social arrangements that afford the widest possible flourishing of particularisms, in ways that enrich rather than restrict civic life. This means designing institutions broad enough to afford space for both the Amish and for ActUp, for the traditional regionalisms of rural Western Europe and for the customs of newly arrived non-European workers admitted to those countries. Second, the left must remain vigilant in defending those who suffer the effects of tribal domination, in any and all of its forms.

In short, we must stand for a world where there are no "wrong kinds of people" in political life—where religion, race, ethnicity, and national heritage are natural expressions of social identification, but neither the inspiration for nor the targets of invidious state policy.

Michael Walzer Replies

Jim Rule's passionate attack on "tribalism" raises more questions than I can possibly address in a brief response. Since I by no means disagree entirely with what he writes, I want to begin by clearing up one misunderstanding. I do not believe—and, of course, nowhere say—that "the tribe is an indispensable . . . facilitator of democracy." My argument, which owes a great deal to the research of Karl Deutsch (see his *Nationalism and Social Communication*, 1953), is that democracy is the "facilitator" of tribalism. Local elites can easily assimilate into the diffuse and open (and in many ways attractive) cosmopolitanism fostered by imperial rule, and that is exactly what they did in the great empires of the past and, more recently, in the communist empire. But the resulting patterns of cultural co-existence and interpenetration depend on the continuing authority of the emperor and his bureaucrats. Only immigrant societies have produced a genuinely democratic multiculturalism.

Everywhere else, popular mobilization against imperialism gives rise to tribal politics—for the simple reason that it is among the people, ordinary men and women, living where they have always lived, sustaining a customary existence, that particular languages, historical memories, and religious beliefs most strongly survive. The struggle for democracy, even before the actual experience of democracy, opens the way for the expression (and the political exploitation) of these particularisms, which imperial rule had everywhere repressed.

It follows that the first question for the Left

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is whether it supports and wants to continue this repression. If it doesn't, then it has to cope with tribalism in some nonrepressive way. The whole point of my article was to defend the moral necessity and the political possibility of coping. I suspect that Jim Rule would rather not (have to) cope. Though he acknowledges that men and women feel "special affinities" for particular other people, and grants the legitimacy of these feelings, he would prefer that they play no part in our, or anyone's, politics. *Political* tribalists are his version of the wrong kind of people. But what does he propose to do with them? It is not as if they are a small number. Unless you deny them admission to the political arena, they will dominate the arena in most parts of the world.

At least, Rule says, we can refuse to support them. But that is not easy for leftists to do, since political tribalism is very often a response to imperial repression or to the more frightening kinds of persecution (associated with empires on the rise or in trouble) that he so eloquently describes. It is the revolt of "the wrong kinds of people" against the conditions of their wrongness. If Jews, or Armenians, or Kurds, or Palestinians demand statehood, it is because they know the dangers of statelessness. Rule wants to legislate against the dangers, but he seems to favor statelessness, at least for peoples like these, for whom it is or was a historical condition (I assume that he thinks it all right for the French to have a state). He would prefer that Jews fight for equal rights in the diaspora, Armenians in Turkey or the Soviet Union, Kurds in Iraq, and Palestinians, though I am less sure here, in Greater Israel. His preference would not be supported, however, by a majority of any of these people, if they were free to decide their own fate: and what would he say then?

But the tribes are a motley lot, and if the four I have just listed need states, there are many that don't. As Rule says, and as I said, tribal identities are neither total nor final. Hence tribal politics can and does take many different forms. Scots, Catalans, Copts, and Druse, for example, probably don't need states of their own. But they, too, will ask for some sort of political accommodation in the postimperial world. And I would like to accommodate them, not in one way, according to some fixed ideological formula, but in many different ways. How else can we help them defeat their own zealots except by removing, so far as we can, the dangers that make zealotry seem a necessary, even a positive force? This certainly doesn't mean that we have to condone the crimes committed in the name of tribalism, any more than we have to condone, because we are social democrats, the crimes committed in the name of the people or of socialism.

One last point: Rule's reiterated refrain about "the wrong kind of people" points toward a more radical universalism than he acknowledges. There can't be a political community of any sort that doesn't favor some particular people, members of the community, over all others. This is what it means to share a common life. With regard to our (no doubt inadequate) program of Aid to Dependent Children, the children of Bangladesh are the wrong kind of people. Welfare, immigration, and employment policies all make for discriminations of this sort. Even when we generously take in political refugees, we choose those with whom we have political affinities: opponents of tyranny (or so we like to think). People with the wrong kind of politics are the wrong kind of people.

There are also, obviously, internal discriminations—as when we choose what language to privilege, what history and civics to teach in the public schools, what holidays to celebrate. In every nation-state in the world, choices like these turn national minorities into the wrong kind of people. Rule's comments on Israel suggest that he finds this intolerable.* But if he really wants to abolish national and cultural favoritism root and branch, he won't be able to accommodate any of the tribes—not even the ones most likely to benefit from the politics he otherwise prefers: those that are already commodiously established, their tribal wars only a memory. □

* His quote from Golda Meir is inaccurate—a sad and entirely avoidable mistake: her argument had to do with the identity, not the existence, of the Palestinians. Since Rule recognizes the artificiality of all national identities, especially in their politicized versions, he ought to be sympathetic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jeremy Larner

IS IT THE SHOES?

In the course of duty your culture commentator finds himself in L.A., attending yet another gathering of the stars who either make us what we are or reflect our dreams of glory. He wanders past banks of refrigerators, among indoor jungles by pools and waterfalls, freezing in pockets of social control as if caught in a series of stop-frames, observing personalities posed in *tableaux* which he could join simply by kneeling in the phantic position. Now and then he is beckoned, offered a line to chant. But largely he glides by as if invisible, preoccupied with the illusion of hunger, or is it simply psychic space to be decorated? His mind fumbling among half-digested bistro reviews, he seeks egress, wondering if he dares eat at a restaurant that will seat him.

He stumbles into the game room, where a clutch of cloned young women coolly shoot pool, arranging each shot to show their sexualized accessories. They glance beyond him, alert for the advent of status in a style so new he wouldn't know it.

He can see the grounds outside through a window, but can't get the window open, nor tell if what he sees is the real outdoors or a backdrop. He pitches upon a couch, glancing about wildly for some printed matter to seize and stay afloat with, and finding none, drops like yesterday's pop charts into the oblivion of sleep.

I am wakened by a melodious voice. A tall black man wearing rubber shoes the size of ski boots, baggy black shorts and a crimson singlet stares out the window, murmuring to himself. "They just don't see me," he murmurs, "for who I am.

"Yo, Jeremy!" he sings out. "We got the same problem, baby!" Such a look he gives me, full of humor and sadness and wonder, just the way black ballplayers used to look at me back in Indianapolis, their eyes fond with indulgence for a white boy born hundreds of years younger than they. As he speaks Michael's eyes spark with ferocity, but at bottom I can see the vast amusement of a man who knows he will die someday. His so-easy movements always hold the hint of a joke; frissons of scorn and delight lick playfully across his lips. It's tongue-smacking delicious, the thought that he and I could have anything in common, other than the assumption I would have more fun in life if I, too, were Michael Jordan.

It seems Michael knows me: he reads *Dissent* from cover to cover and secretly agrees with the democratic left perspective. His great problem in life is that the unreal commodities of tube-recognition and tube-approval are what enable him to speak to black children coming up without much help in the city. To maintain his privilege of speaking and being heard, he has to carry out the expectations of black jock hero in the consumer society. He knows it's silly and degrading to think that young inner city kids prefer a ballplayer as a "role model," but the silliness and degradation were not invented by him, they are the conditions of his life, the only materials with which he has to work.

One summer, he tells me, he didn't touch a basketball, dressed every day in chinos and a white shirt and went around to young people's workshops at community centers. He told the kids they had to face the fact they were still behind, even though their ancestors were brought to this country two or three hundred years ago. They had to work harder just to get an even chance. There are only so many slots open in the NBA, MTV, or on the Arsenio Hall show. For most young black people, survival and self-respect require that they study hard every night, develop computer skills and good work habits, practice safe sex with safe partners, postpone marriage and children, avoid alcohol and drugs, get transitional jobs and save their salaries in low-interest insured accounts at banks not run by big-time looters, not buy things they can't afford, get regular health check-ups, be active in their neighborhoods, vote, and keep informed. This is what the American Dream has amounted to, Michael told them, for most people who've worked up into it, seen their children prosper and been in a position to spoil their grandchildren.

Not! the young folk sneered. They ain't no jobs except sweeping up at Burger King, and that's where they keep you too. Even white people get no jobs unless they're connected. Your choice is, you study the asses of every shape and color on the ladder

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

above you, walk their walk and talk their talk, with an eye to rip off their gear when you get the chance, show how hot you are and get people glad to throw more stuff at you just for the chance to hang out—just like they do with you, Michael.

But no! Michael says. What he's found is he likes to sneak off and hang with the unknown and unsung, people who don't give a damn about what's being worn or bought or watched, people who know the books that give the all-time thrills, people who love what they learn and new ways of putting it together. These people can earn enough because they can get into new fields when old ones wear out, or make up jobs of their own to meet the world's needs. They can do this because they have learned how to think, how to make an argument and test it, how to get data and analyze it, how to give your reactions free rein while at the same time examining them, discounting for your own prejudices. How to refine a problem by asking better questions. How to make distinctions. How to sleep on a notion, let it evolve, put it aside and come back to it.

"You write culture notes," he said. "How can there be any lasting culture, how can culture draw out what's best in us, let alone provide jobs and make arrangements for useful, playful lives, without respect for the creative act of thinking, for learning to take joy in your mind the way an athlete takes joy in his body? When I work on the fundamentals, I get easy with my techniques—and then this dazzling array of options opens to me. I fill my place on the court; my team and I invent new patterns, new possibilities that did not exist before. That's what I live for, not the money, the cheers or the clothes, though I like that stuff too. What keeps me, finally, from losing my mind is the state of grace when I can lose myself in what I'm doing—and I think anyone could feel that, one way or another. That's why we have to retrain our work force, to teach them ways of personal satisfaction. We want to open them to the experience of the most ordinary beauty, beauty you can spot on every block walking through downtown New York or Chicago. It's all around us, only it's rare for people to feel it, and they can't describe it in the language of competing and winning, whipping ass, scoring drugs or designer dresses or showstopping spouses, vintage wines or appliances.

"That's why I get so turned off watching politicians talk about education. They want to give kids passes to go to private schools, when the public school system is already falling apart. They want to get tough, like so many Clint Eastwoods, give every kid the same tests. But you won't catch them rapping about what education should be in a democracy, and what it might cost to pay teachers a self-respecting wage and create the conditions where you help students develop as thinkers.

"Hey, I saw one liberal senator on the tube talking about saving money by demobilizing the army, and putting the NCO's to work in the schools. This cat went to Princeton, and he never learned the difference between a teacher and a drillmaster!

"You catch George Bush in the middle of the '88 campaign, when the *Times* ask him what book he read most change his life? He say, he had to read *War and Peace* in prep school, they made him read the whole damn thing, and that taught him the meaning of hard work. What a jive example for kids! That's why I cut out when they brought the Chicago Bulls to appear with Bush in the Rose Garden to celebrate our championship. Everyone under the age of 40 could spot a TV stunt to let the Pres be one of the guys, and he's not!

"Now the other guys on the Bulls needed that, for them it was one of those times when you have to dance the game to get the prize. It's like bucking for a $4 million salary, because guys not as good as you get three-and-a-half. We have to show our kids we hold out for what we're worth, and we don't let the bosses take all the TV money and treat us like field hands. But hell, I'd take a lot less if they lowered prices—and if the bosses didn't insist on cities building them stadiums with public money. Let the teams take care of themselves with their own earnings, while city people get their share of the pie through better schools and teachers, parks, hospitals and like that. If I could work out that deal, hey, I'd drop down to the same salary the owner gets.

"So I skip the White House to play golf, which shows the kids I can keep on doing stuff that's creative for me, and no one else has to profit off it. Not much of a lesson, but it's the most I can get away with at the time. It might help my fans to see you can reach a level where you can't be bought except when the price is right for you.

"You see, the problem about African Americans began with slavery. We freed the slaves, but we didn't close all the slave markets. I dig it that one of your *Dissent* editors writes books about when violence is and is not justified for political ends. Hey, this Michael Walzer is a good role model for thinking. And for making distinctions: he splits up answers into a lot of questions, then finds subtle ways of answering that suit the inequalities people really face in various societies. Walzer's the Michael Jordan of political-ethical theory, you might say. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remember Walzer says the one time murder is justified is to escape slavery. He was thinking not only of black slaves, but of the Israelites and the Pharoah, the Roman slaves, the Russian serfs, the Europeans faced with Hitler and Stalin, etc. I bring this up not to say African Americans are still slaves, or entitled to vigilante violence, though some do think that, and I'll get to that in a moment.

"No, what occurred to me is these Nike commercials I'm always thinking about and trying to get straight on in my head. In the commercials, I have a good time, and never do anything that's not me. I go into flight patterns, do dunks, and fool around with my buddy Spike Lee, who does the comic number and pesters me—'Is it the shoes?' Then Nike gets out these big fancy shoes in ten colors with all kinds of straps and innersoles and adjustments, plus a line of fancy workout clothes under my name, showing the kids you can succeed in this world and buy your own stuff made first of all for blacks, with the white folks following—at least, that was what we told each other for a while.

"Trouble is, it turned out kids with not much money were killing other kids to strip their shoes. Were we teaching them that material stuff is more important than thou shalt not kill? All the charity stuff Nike started doing don't quite erase this in my mind.

"And I thought some more about Michael Walzer. I thought how no black star would turn down the chance to make millions from Nike—no white star would either. Sure, having a black star shows we're the best at this particular gig, we define what the top is and how it looks. Can't give that up. But then we find ourselves co-opted to stand behind some killing. Just getting up there we saying shoes worth killing for. And the Nike slogan, dig it, is 'Just do it!' But Walzer says only slavery is worth killing for. It's like saving your family's life, like lots of us really have to do in the projects. So it occurs to me all the stars doing TV ads are slaves. To be almost any type of American-type TV celebrity is to be a slave. You're saying, you can't help it, you got to load up the people with all kinds of falseness that degrades them and keeps them from ease or beauty or real learning, and that can even set them killing. But you can't help it, you a slave.

"You can imagine Spike and me had quite a go-round about this. For Spike, it's part of his trip, getting out his own clothes in his own store for black people. And they get to know his face on TV, he gets money to make his movies, which get into the conditions of black folk in America. Then I read your column in *Dissent*, Jeremy, and I see how Spike half shows the real thing and half keeps woofing the violence commercial number. I'm not in control of Spike, but he's trying. He got the Nike people to make some new stuff where you see black gym rats jiving with white gym rats, calling each other names. Then Spike comes along with a special effects gym, where everything is in day-glo computer colors, and he say, 'In Spike's gym, you have to play with all the colors.' So they start in playing together, and they're grooving, and their Nike shoes got new hot colors you never seen before.

"But I don't know if this solves the problem. Sometimes I think they just found a fancy way to use racism to sell shoes. Would that be a first, the biggest and newest? Well, that's what America is all about, and maybe you either play or don't play. Maybe it's like what's happening with the Gangsta Rap groups. What's frightening is not the violent, hateful lyrics, so much as the real people out there who feel that way and can't cash in on it like the record companies. And when I can't sleep at night, I think these kids still be killing one another for the shoes.

"It gets back to the thinking stuff again. Spike got the money to do the first feature on Malcolm X, because Malcolm is 'our black prince,' as Ossie Davis said. He was one brave guy. But it bother me, when I read Malcolm's book, about the thinking problem. He goes through all these stages—pimp, Muslim, black nationalist—and in every one of them, he got a fast set of answers, like a number one street hustler. He say, for example, Masons got only thirty-three degrees of the truth, but Allah put 360 degrees into a circle. Now my cousin in the Air Force say, hey, the Pentagon got 540 degrees! Malcolm gave us names and sayings, but in a way he was like the white preachers getting across on TV. He didn't leave any questions open, didn't leave room for people to think about what's happening in this country or work out what to do about it."

"I've wondered," I say, "what are the political accomplishments of Malcolm X?"

"Zilch," says Michael. "What he did was all psychological, except for some good stuff like organizing Muslim prisoners and getting them into a clean life. But that tends to take black people away from the country around them, see, not to change it. Still, Malcolm changed our attitude forever, and you can't say for better or worse, because, when you think about it, the change was inevitable. Malcolm taught black people it was OK to stand up and say how it was, tell their hate if need be, make their demands, defend themselves 'by any means necessary.' That was a big relief to a lot of us, even though it backfired in the streets, even though it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drove off well-meaning whites and their politicians, even if it's not clear where the process is going to lead us. And besides, who else accomplished anything politically for the black man in this country?"

"Martin Luther King, among others, and the people who followed him, black and white. In 1965, they got equality and integration written into federal law."

"Right on! And that's why us black celebrities hold down our own in the TV commercials and sit-coms, that's why there's some jobs for us in the army, the government bureaucracy, the corporations. But what tears us apart is that, for the people Malcolm came from and talked about, things haven't changed, they've only gotten worse. For the masses of black people, all they got is the American Dream life they see people like me leading on TV."

Which brings Michael to the reason he sought me out in California. He's proposed a new deal to the Nike company. He will reduce his commercial fee to $1 million, if only they will let him speak in his own words, without cuts or changes. He wants me to help him with a brief statement, which will put shoes and black superstars in perspective, without offending anyone or closing doors. Retreating to the playhouse in the children's wing, we create something like the following:

Hello, people. I want you to know, whenever you see me doing my thing, I'm wearing Nike Air Jordan shoes. I helped design 'em, I like 'em better than any other shoes, and I think they look the most cool. Of course everyone's feet are different, and some other brand might fit you better. Some of the others are just as good, and anyhow, I'd play as well in almost any shoes. You might even have your own look that's just as good as mine. Just because I'm better at basketball, make money, and look sharp at all times, don't mean my look or my way of doing things is any better than yours. Work on your own, think things through for yourself, and don't forget the really best books in the world are the ones that will be the strongest to read, and will get you thinking.

Remember: no one has the answers, that's why living the good life in America depends on equality, opportunity, education, and tolerance. Shoes really aren't that important, and neither is anything else that money buys unless you need it to survive or think it's beautiful. Shoes and stuff like that are never worth killing or dying for. If you get my shoes that way, something in you dies like it dies in the souls of rich guys who loot corporations and suck old folks' savings out of banks and sell arms to third-world dictators.

But if you need a pair of shoes, I hope you'll try on some Nikes, and if not the Air Jordan line, whatever style you can afford. Nike tries to support good stuff with some of their profits, gives equipment to the needy, and puts me on TV to show you at least one African American success story. You, too, can go for the good things. You probably won't wind up as famous or rich as me, but you can do even better in ways that are emotionally richer, deeper, and give you more privacy to decide for yourself what's worth living for, and what we might do to bring about a better, fairer world to live in. Thank you.

Nike has responded favorably to our new script, and has scheduled it for shooting right around the time President Clinton leads the U.S. Congress in restructuring our educational and economic systems. Till then, Michael and I wish to remind you, it's definitely not the shoes! □

Leonard Quart

JEWS AND BLACKS IN HOLLYWOOD

More than a year ago Legrand Clegg—president of a media watchdog organization, the Coalition Against Black Exploitation—was applauded at the NAACP convention in Los Angeles when he charged that "the century-old problem of Jewish racism in Hollywood" denies blacks access to positions of power in the industry. The charge of "Jewish racism" in both executive hiring and Hollywood movie images of blacks was more recently echoed in the race-baiting, reminiscent of anti-Semitic tracts like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* of City College professor Leonard Jeffries, Jr. In a speech at the Empire State Black Arts and Cultural Festival in Albany he stated that "Russian Jewry had a particular control over the movies," and with "their financial partners—the Mafia—put together a financial system for the destruction of black people." The attacks were not only racist in nature but distorted the role played by Jews in Hollywood.

There is no denying the fact that, since the founding of the film industry, Jews have played a dominant role, and that blacks have been, until recently, almost powerless to influence their representation in Hollywood films. These bare facts, however, account only for a piece of a complex story.

The first generation of Hollywood moguls, immigrants like Adoph Zukor and Carl Laemmele, were semiliterate, uncultivated descendants of poverty and of conservative and religious Jewish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

upbringings. They were men who brought great entrepreneurial energy and a genius for intuiting and helping to shape the dreams and desires of American audiences, and by the 1920s successfully moved from owning neighborhood nickelodeons to becoming the heads of major studios.

But their success did not mean a seamless entry into the American mainstream. In 1920s Los Angeles they faced discrimination from WASP social clubs and private schools, and, periodically, the industry came under attack from groups like the fundamentalists, who saw the Jews as a money-hungry, subversive force promoting sexual immorality. Given the moguls' fear of anti-Semitic attacks, and their desire for assimilation into the mainstream culture, their relationship to Jewishness was profoundly ambivalent.

The moguls still conspicuously gave money to Jewish charities and organizations; supported, though rarely attended, the local Beverly Hills temple; and favored fellow Jews when they hired studio executives. However, most of the moguls passionately wanted to assimilate, to become full-fledged, respectable Americans. A number of them discarded their Jewish wives for second marriages to Gentiles, sought friendship with Catholic prelates, and avidly sought to live in a manner—palatial homes, luxurious country clubs, expensive restaurants—that mimicked what they conceived of as the genteel style of an Eastern aristocracy. The moguls never could obliterate their Jewishness, but they could sanitize and Americanize themselves, and their films provided a perfect canvas on which to construct their vision of America. For Louis B. Mayer at MGM, America was never represented by Jewish life in New York or Los Angeles, but by Mickey Rooney's Andy Hardy—an all-American boy in a mythical small town.

Among the huge number of films made between 1900 to 1929 there were, according to Lester Friedman in his *Hollywood's Image of the Jew,* only "approximately 230 films featuring clearly discernible Jewish characters." The silent films emphasized the shedding of traditional and constricted religious and cultural patterns (many of them depicted in a stereotyped, comic, and patronizing manner), to be replaced by an American milieu characterized by intermarriage, economic achievement, mobility, and a general accommodation to American values (for instance, *The Jazz Singer* [1927]). By the 1930s, as they became more fully assimilated, the moguls wanted the lives portrayed in front of the camera to be free of any reminder of their ethnic past. (Though Warner Brothers' films often centered on working-class, even ethnic heroes, there were almost no Jews among them.) Wary of offending the Gentiles lest they lose their audiences, they avoided Jewish subjects, provided little work for Jewish character actors, and anglicized the names of Jewish stars (Marion Levy became Paulette Goddard, Julius Garfinkle became John Garfield). As screenwriter Michael Blankfort said about the moguls: "They were accidental Jews, terribly frightened Jews, who rejected their background to become super-Americans. They were interested in power and profit. They would hardly ever touch a story with a Jewish character, and if they did, they usually cast a Gentile for the part."

Paralyzed by both the fear of calling attention to themselves as Jews and the need to preserve lucrative markets abroad, the moguls were incapable of confronting the growing specter of European anti-Semitism. Two years after the viciously racist 1935 Nuremberg Laws were passed, Warner Brothers could make a film about the Dreyfus case, *The Life of Emile Zola,* without ever using the word "Jew." And the few Hollywood films that dealt with the ominous events in Nazi Germany almost totally skirted the issue of anti-Semitism. Scriptwriter Ben Hecht acerbically summed up the moguls' response to the rise of Nazism: "[A]ll of Hollywood's top Jews went around with their grief hidden like a Jewish fox under their Gentile vests." It took the Second World War to grant the moguls an escape from their dilemma. They supported the war effort by making patriotic films that touched on Nazi atrocities, finally free from being viewed as parochially acting out of Jewish self-interest or indulging in special pleading for the Jews.

The moguls' depiction of Jews was clearly not only motivated by their own unease with their Jewishness but by their unwillingness to take political, aesthetic, and intellectual risks that might alienate the mass Gentile audience. Consequently, in the forties, when Jewish characters began to reappear in films, the emphasis was on the unity of all ethnic groups, never their differences. America became the home of a platoon of heterogeneous ethnic groups who harmoniously fought, joked, and worked together in films like *The Purple Heart* (1944) and *A Walk in the Sun* (1945)—citizens of a mythical melting pot.

Even in postwar social-problem films like Elia Kazan's Oscar-winning *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), which explores facets of anti-Semitism that had rarely been depicted by Hollywood in previous decades, the narrative centers on a WASP magazine writer, Phil Green (Gregory Peck), who pretends to be a Jew for two months so he can write an exposé

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of anti-Semitism. Despite the film's providing a more complex account of anti-Semitism than the Hollywood norm, the use of a Gentile journalist as its protagonist blurred the whole issue, creating the illusion that Jews had no distinctive social and cultural history or ethnic character—that Jews were indistinguishable from Gentiles.

Even in the forties the moguls were afraid to evoke the nature of Jewish reality on the screen. So it is no surprise, given the pervasiveness of racism, that black characters in Hollywood's first thirty or so years (in their generally fleeting screen appearances) were usually depicted in contemptuous terms. From the time of *Birth of a Nation* (1915) on, blacks were often stereotyped as brutal, savage bucks (who lusted after white women), insidious mulattoes, good toms and mammies, or coons like Stepan Fetchit's indolent, dim, shuffling, grinning character. Fetchit was extremely popular and made and lost a million during his heyday—the thirties—and while playing a self-demeaning figure who had an affectionate but totally subordinate relationship with his master, gave an ironic, self-protective spin to his comic behavior. All these stereotypes, of course, could be found in the pre- and post–Civil War era in greeting cards, children's book illustrations, knick-knacks, Currier and Ives prints, and minstrel shows. Hollywood bears responsibility for perpetuating these repellent images, but did not give birth to them. And in the thirties Hollywood did provide work for black entertainers and musicians like Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong, who played in a number of musical shorts and features (for example, *The Hit Parade of 1937*), projecting talented, self-assured black images and sometimes performing with integrated groups.

By the 1940s, Hollywood began to produce social-problem films that explored racism as an issue. But films such as *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Lost Boundaries* (1949) tended to evasion, affirming tolerance and integration, providing it was for blacks who behaved like WASPs. In addition, *Home of the Brave* defined racism as a psychological problem—it portrayed racists as pathological characters and black anguish as a hypersensitivity to prejudice. The forties' social-problem films provided little sense of how profound and pernicious a role racism played in the daily life of blacks and the society as a whole. Racism was conceived as a problem that existed between individuals, simply resolved by a dose of sympathy and understanding. It was the classic Hollywood way of treating social problems—personalizing them rather than dealing with their social or historical context and texture.

The Jewish moguls were conformists who most likely shared the racist feelings of their Gentile peers and the society at large. They allowed and even promoted racial stereotypes when it meant being in accord with dominant white attitudes and minimizing the economic and social risks faced by their films. Still, when social attitudes towards blacks began to shift, they permitted a more liberal handling of racial themes. Though these social-problem films about race were deeply flawed and politically pallid—severely compromised by having white performers like Jeanne Crain and Mel Ferrer playing blacks—and turned most of their black characters into social symbols, devoid of individuality, they still demonstrated that political liberalism had begun to take root in historically conservative Hollywood. In fact, such facilely optimistic works were sufficiently liberal to move a few steps ahead of their forties white audience on racial issues.

In the fifties and sixties Sidney Poitier appeared in *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *Lilies of the Field* (1963), and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (1967) playing in each a black hero who was charismatic, seductive, and superior to the whites who surrounded him. It was that dignity that made Poitier the one black star who was consistently successful with white audiences. Poitier's characters never bowed and scraped, but they were so reasonable and humane that the white audience knew there was nothing to fear from them. During the late sixties, Poitier's movie persona was dismissed by more militant and activist blacks as middle class and masochistic. Nevertheless, he was one black actor who didn't have to sing, dance, or roll his eyes to appear on the screen. And though the films he appeared in were neither politically incisive nor artistically imaginative, the emergence of even a token black star could be seen as a minor triumph.

The sixties also saw Sidney Lumet's ambitious film *The Pawnbroker* (1965), which paralleled the emotional deadness and isolation of a concentration camp survivor, imprisoned by his past, with images of squalid Harlem streets and its own social victims. It's an overheated film, which, though straining too hard to link the Jewish past with urban black-Hispanic experience, succeeded in creating Jewish and black characters who can't be reduced to ethnic and racial types. *The Pawnbroker*'s central figure, Nazerman—a professor and survivor turned pawnbroker—was a complex, difficult figure who defied sentimentalization. The film's attempt to connect Jewish and black suffering, though self-conscious, was a welcome shift from the old blackface tradition where Jewish entertainers like Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor caricatured black cultural styles in order,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unconsciously or consciously, to convey their superiority to them.

It's not that Hollywood in the sixties suddenly became an industry where aesthetically adventurous, intellectually serious, or politically challenging works became the norm. Nor were there a slew of films seriously examining black reality or Jewish-Gentile intermarriage, the growth of Jewish orthodoxy, black-Jewish relations, or the connection of American Jews to Israel.

Nevertheless, as art or dross, the last few decades saw Hollywood's predominantly, but far from exclusively, Jewish production people become more at ease in portraying Jewishness (ownership is now largely in the hands of other people—Sony owns Columbia and Rupert Murdoch owns Fox). From directors like Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, and Paul Mazursky, a variety of openly Jewish characters have appeared on film, though Jewish milieus have for the most part been portrayed warily or left unexplored. (It's interesting to note that Barry Levinson's evocation of his familial past, *Avalon* (1990), uses non-Jewish stars like Joan Plowright to play one of his immigrant Jewish grandparents, and centers the extended family's holiday dinners around Thanksgiving, not Passover.) The industry's growing ease with Jewishness comes at a point when intermarriage is a commonplace, and assimilation for Jews is a relatively natural process. For the Hollywood Jews acceptance in America has moved them to project an ethnic consciousness in many of their films, so they can marginally differentiate themselves from the American mainstream without asserting a separate religious or cultural identity. In films like *Annie Hall* Woody Allen's character speaks and jokes about his Jewish identity and past and is obsessed with anti-Semitism, but neither lives in a Jewish world nor defines his personal problems in ethnic terms.

Obviously, there is no way that one can equate Hollywood's essentially fearful and innocuous treatment of Jewish life with its generally degrading depiction of black reality. Still, the industry's past unwillingness to deal with Jewish characters and themes illuminates how apprehensive, hungry for social acceptance, and concerned about the bottom line the moguls were, and provides a historical context for those years of films that reinforced the most denigrating stereotypes of blacks.

The new generation of Hollywood executives is clearly more liberal and sophisticated about racial issues than either the contemporary mass audience or than Harry Cohn or Louis B. Mayer ever were. But what motivates their support of the new Hollywood flowering of black directors is not altruism or a desire to be "politically correct," but marketing surveys that tell them that there is an audience for the films of young black directors like John Singleton and Spike Lee. For the moment, they believe that these films can tap that one-quarter of the film audience that is black, and begin to cross over to the white audience as well. Many of the black-directed films merely exploit inner-city despair and violence, as *New Jack City* (1991) does, or have no other aim than escapist entertainment like *Juice* (1992), *A Rage in Harlem* (1991), *House Party* (1991), and *Strictly Business* (1991). The more serious films like *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991), and Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) run the danger of suggesting to white audiences that black reality can be reduced to underclass life, the ethos of which seems more sensational than the life of the black middle class. Still, all these films—both black-directed genre entertainments and auteurist, personal works—are clearly an unprecedented step for Hollywood.

What black talent confronts in Hollywood today is not racism, though it must unconsciously motivate some of the decisions that are made, but the incestuousness of an industry that hires from a narrow pool of applicants (for example, how many top women executives work in Hollywood?), and a commitment to a hard-edged capitalist ethos. If black-directed films make a profit, there will be many more of them, and ultimately even black executives on the production level. Hollywood is at once a relatively liberal and a meretricious industry, primarily committed to making a profit and producing pap.

At this moment, then, engaging in shrill, rhetorical attacks on "Jewish racism in Hollywood" is morally abhorrent, politically counterproductive, and simplistic. That isn't to say that Hollywood's perpetuation of racial stereotypes does not merit anger. But the conspiratorial rhetoric about past victimization often blurs the fact that for blacks in America with talent and drive, from Colin Powell to Spike Lee, there are now some genuine options. In Hollywood today it's not racism that shapes decision making. It's what sells. □

The two most valuable works involved in researching this piece were Neal Gabler's *Empire of Their Own* and Lester Friedman's *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*. This article first appeared in a slightly different version in *Cinéaste*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

George Scialabba

THE INIMITABLE GBS

BERNARD SHAW: A BIOGRAPHY, by Michael Holroyd. Random House. VOLUME I: THE SEARCH FOR LOVE, 1856–1898. 486 pp., $24.95 ($15.95 paper), 1988.

VOLUME II: THE PURSUIT OF POWER, 1898–1918. 421 pp., $24.95 ($16.00 paper), 1989.

VOLUME III: THE LURE OF FANTASY, 1918–1951. 544 pp., $30.00, 1991.

The most famous European writer of the first half of the twentieth century was not Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Mann, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Rilke, Lawrence, Brecht, Gide, or Pasternak. In fact, if one could somehow quantify literary celebrity, I suspect these dozen immortals would scarcely make up his sum. Perhaps the most surprising revelation in Michael Holroyd's immense biography is the degree to which this period was the Age of Shaw. His plays were performed, his books sold, his lectures attended, his opinions publicized, his correspondence engaged, and his philanthropy solicited (usually successfully) at a staggering rate. "Of his influence," Edmund Wilson concluded in 1936, "it is not necessary to speak. The very methods we use to check him have been partly learned in his school."

Of Shaw's influence it may once again be necessary to speak. "The confusions of his politics," Wilson judged, "have not invalidated his social criticism." Today, however, *Commentary*'s reviewer of *Bernard Shaw* judges differently: "[I]n the wake of the worldwide collapse of Communism, it is hard to see how Shaw can continue to be taken seriously as a playwright of ideas." Hard, perhaps, but worth the effort.

Holroyd is helpful on this score, though not authoritative, since his main interest in Shaw is not ideological but psychological. What made G.B.S. run, and in so many directions? Holroyd's answers are suggested by the titles of his three volumes, especially the first. "In the lost childhood of Sonny [Shaw's family nickname]," Holroyd proposes, "the philosophy of G.B.S. was conceived." Shaw's father was ineffectual and a drinker; his mother largely ignored her husband and son in favor of her gifted daughters and, especially, her voice teacher, the romantic, enigmatic George Vandeleur Lee. The family was shabby-genteel, shunned by respectable relatives on both sides. Young Sonny had only his imagination to entertain and comfort him. It was, Shaw later wrote, a "devil of a childhood . . . rich only in dreams, frightful and loveless in realities."

Biographer and subject differ about what Sonny made of this bleak beginning. Shaw usually professed gratitude for benign parental neglect, to which (along with the Irish climate) he attributed his "humorous power of resisting sentimental illusions." Holroyd demurs. "Replacing mordant sentimentality by 'eternal derision,' Sonny began to laugh pain out of existence." Began and continued until, at the end, "what he had done was not (as he claimed) to change dreaming for reality, but to replace the first loveless reality with one dream and then another."

Explaining Shaw, or anyone, without diminishing him requires considerable tact. By and large, Holroyd succeeds: he proves his case but does not make too much of it. A great many of us, after all, have had a devil of a childhood. The relentless Shavian critique of romantic love and other "sentimental illusions" may have originated in early unmet needs, but it issued in sublime word-music and scintillating dramatic dialectics. "Neurosis may be the occasion," as Philip Rahv wrote of Kafka, "but literature is the consequence."

Shaw himself insisted that he cared only for making effective propaganda and not a whit for making literature. History always gets the last laugh, however, even on a prince of jesters. Shaw's dramaturgy is now pretty generally esteemed, while his political and philosophical opinions, when not ignored, are condescended to in the manner of *Commentary*'s reviewer. My own view is that people who do not take Shaw seriously need not be taken seriously.

About his character, at any rate, there can be no dispute. Shaw was a secular saint. He gave away his time, money, and advice without reserve and with exquisite tact; and in the course of a long and fantastically eventful life, he seems never to have done a mean deed or spoken a cruel or dishonest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word. He was as good as he was clever—and what more can one say than that?

Still, how about "the confusions of his politics"? During and after his trip to the USSR in 1931, Shaw was given to saying things like "I wish we had forced labor in England, in which case we would not have 2,000,000 unemployed" and "Our question is not to kill or not to kill, but how to select the right people to kill. . . . The essential difference between the Russian liquidator with his pistol (or whatever his humane killer may be) and the British hangman is that they do not operate on the same person." If Shaw was so wise and good, then how, the question may arise (needless to say, *Commentary*'s reviewer rubs our noses in it), did he wind up a Stalinist?

He didn't, exactly. This answer, however, calls for a few distinctions. Norman Podhoretz, William F. Buckley, Jr., Paul Johnson, and George Will have all published apologetics for, or urged politics in support of, severely authoritarian right-wing regimes or movements. Yet it would never occur to me to label any of them a "fascist." There are degrees of obloquy. Podhoretz et al. are intelligent, earnest people with a very firm grasp of several half- (or quarter-) truths. Shaw's utterances on the Soviet Union were unfortunate, even appalling. But to classify—especially for the purpose of summarily dismissing—someone as a "Stalinist" who devoted, I would guess, considerably less than one-tenth of one percent of his *oeuvre* to discussion (not wholly uncritical) of Soviet communism is unfair, and even a little absurd.

There are qualitative as well as quantitative considerations. Take this familiar passage from Orwell's "Politics and the English Language":

> In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. Things like . . . the Russian purges . . . can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face. . . . Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. . . . Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, "I believe in killing your opponents when you can get good results by doing so." Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:
>
> > While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigors which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.

The clear implication of Orwell's essay is that a Stalinist is necessarily a hack. But Shaw was incapable of mere cant, of "euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness." He could no more write a stale, ugly, clumsily obfuscating sentence than could Orwell himself. (Or Podhoretz or Alexander Cockburn.) In the comments I quoted a few paragraphs ago, Shaw does not waffle about "a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition" being "unavoidable." He says "kill" (four times in a short passage, like waving a Vietcong flag at an American Legion convention) and "forced labor." These sentences are not apologetics, they are a provocation. A Stalinist could not have written them; Stalinists are capable of sarcasm, but not of irony.

"I am tired," Shaw wrote in his eighties, "of the way in which the newspapers . . . continue to make it appear that I am an admirer of dictatorship. All my work shows the truth to be otherwise." Not quite all, but most of it does, from the *Fabian Essays* to "The Revolutionist's Handbook" to *Common Sense About the War* to *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* to *Everybody's Political What's What*. Shaw blamed this misunderstanding, with much justification, on the brainlessness and bad faith of the capitalist press. He knew, as Holroyd points out, quoting a sympathetic contemporary journalist, that "if he said nine things favorable to the Soviet Union and one thing hostile, the reporters would cable over to America the one hostile comment and suppress the nine favorable." (Much as opponents of the Vietnam War who criticized the postwar regime frequently saw their statements appear stripped of qualifications and context, thereby assisting the rehabilitation of the interventionist consensus.) And so, exasperated, Shaw would say "ten favorable and not one thing hostile."

It was a no-win situation, and Shaw made the worst of it by tossing those verbal stink bombs about the desirability of forced labor and the problem of choosing the right people to kill. To the degree these remarks were jokes, they were in execrable taste; to the degree they were not, they were something worse. Still, let no one condemn Shaw without appreciating what provoked these (infrequent) outbursts of savage misanthropy. Shaw was not "some comfortable English professor" of the sort scoffed at by Orwell. He was poor into his forties, worked sixteen hours a day all his life, and gave thousands of speeches to workers' groups, church groups, women's groups, and anyone else who asked, without ever accepting a fee. He knew the British working class quite as intimately as Orwell did, or as Silone knew the Italian peasantry. He was perhaps the most important feminist of this century. His was the sanest and bravest voice in England during the First World War. But the popular credulity, chauvinism, and bloodlust evoked by that war, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well as the cowardice and conformism of editors, other authors, and Labour politicians, wounded and disillusioned him. His antidemocratic vein was, at least in part, the spitefulness of the rejected suitor. In a sense, it showed how much he still cared.

The refractoriness of the masses is a perennial embarrassment to the honest democrat. The temptation either to abandon some part of one's democratic ideals or to take refuge in sentimental illusions is enormous, and Shaw did not always succeed in resisting it. What can be said in his defense is that hardly anyone else has, either.

Stalinism is a red herring, then; but were Shaw's politics authoritarian, hierarchical, elitist? Didn't the Fabian strategy of socialism by installments, supervised by enlightened civil servants, amount to forcing people to be free, or perhaps tricking us into it, or at any rate dispensing with our participation in our own liberation? An almost entirely nationalized economy, the state as virtually sole employer—it sounds pretty dubious in 1992.

Shaw was not blind to the dangers of state control. Apropos of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's famous report to the British government on social policy, which became the program of the Fabian Society, he observed:

> These proposals are the most valuable yet made; and for years to come our main business will be to induce the country to accept them. And yet . . . consider what they mean. . . . We shall be serfs of the bureaucracy. . . . We are to be drilled like soldiers if the bureaucrats cannot find us a job; and if they find us one and we do not choose to take it, they are to haul us off to a penal colony and flog us . . . if it pleases them to allege that this is the right way to deal with refractory laborers. No such total abrogation of personal liberty has been proposed for white men since liberalism was invented.

Again no euphemism, no cloudy vagueness. William F. Buckley, Jr. himself could scarcely wax more eloquent or, apparently, indignant.

> What are the safeguards [Shaw continued] against the abuse of this appalling extension of bureaucratic power? In the [Webbs'] Report, absolutely none. It is left an open question whether . . . democracy and representative government will be a sufficient protection . . . or constitutional guarantees of some sort or whether we are to imagine that all the new bureaucrats will be Sidney Webbs.

Shaw, naturally, had an answer to this all-important open question. "In a Social-Democratic state . . . everybody would be an official, or an ex-official, or a future official, or the relative or at all events the unquestionable equal of an official." The royal road to this blessed condition of universal social and political equality was to be equality of income. In a formulation that provoked even his fellow Fabians, he wrote: "Socialism means equality of income and nothing else." What he actually meant was that from equality of income everything else followed. In *The Intelligent Woman's Guide* Shaw argued at length (and persuasively—it's a pity he was not around to make mincemeat of Milton Friedman and Robert Nozick) that no other principle of distribution is just or efficient. Allot exactly equal shares of the national product to every adult and child, and both the motive and means of bureaucratic abuse, commercial fraud, featherbedding, the subjection of women, racial discrimination, and all the other injustices of class society would be enormously diminished if not eliminated. Of course any such policy would itself require coercion if it were not based on popular comprehension and consent. But if it were, and real social power—that is, money—were distributed equally, it would at least no longer be impossible to distribute security, leisure, interesting work, and other social goods fairly.

Whatever one thinks of Shaw's scheme (Michael Walzer's criticisms of "simple equality" in *Spheres of Justice* are relevant, though not, to my mind, decisive), the history of Soviet-style pseudosocialism has almost no bearing on it. The essence of Fabianism was gradualism: a series of carefully prepared and legislated nationalizations. This partly for reasons of efficiency, because expropriation of resources without a plan for their alternative use was mere doctrinaire revolutionism; but equally important, from a decent respect for public opinion. The Fabians may have been elitists, but they were above all (or underneath all) utilitarians, pragmatists, disciples of John Stuart Mill, and therefore persuaded of the ultimate futility of large-scale coercion. Perhaps some Bolsheviks were similarly persuaded. But the small purchase of liberalism in Russian political and moral culture, and, still more important, the immediate and unremitting threat of violent overthrow from within and without, rendered any such conviction nugatory.

"Political drudgery has swamped my literary career altogether," Shaw grumbled in 1889. The drudgery lasted another sixty years, but his literary career made a comeback. Holroyd's literary criticism is uneven: his discussion of Shaw's five novels and of the late, now mostly unread and unperformed plays (*The Apple Cart, Too True to Be Good, On the Rocks, Geneva, Village Wooing,* etc.) is useful, but only when relating the work to the life, and especially to the early life, does he put his heart into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it. His psychologizing is deft, persuasive, and, up to a point—the point that marks off biography from criticism—rewarding. But a great deal lies beyond that point.

To be fair to Holroyd, there may not be much that's fresh or original to say about Creative Evolution, the Superman, the New Woman, and the rest of Shaw's characteristic themes. As Holroyd notes: "Even before his death . . . in 1950, infinitely more had been written about Shaw than about any other modern writer." Presumably Holroyd, having read this commentary, saw no point in adding to it, especially since he had a mass of new material (this is the first biography written with the full cooperation of Shaw's estate, and took fifteen years to research and write) and a new interpretive angle. I cannot fault his choice, but I also cannot resist, in conclusion, gnawing just a bit at those old bones myself.

Though his long life spanned both eras, Shaw is usually, and plausibly, classed as one of the last Victorians rather than as one of the first modernists. In "The Culture of Modernism," Irving Howe describes the modernist as "disdainful of certainty," and prone to "extreme subjectivity"; as one who experiences "a choking nausea before the idea of culture" and who "despairs of human history," turning instead to a "preoccupation with psychic inwardness." The modernist writer typically "strives for sensations," has "little use for 'wisdom,' " and becomes "entranced with the depths." Howe concludes: "If there is in literary modernism a dominant preoccupation . . . it is the specter of nihilism." Few twentieth-century writers resemble this description less than Shaw. His temperament was robustly, almost bewilderingly, healthy; for all his political disappointment and philosophical skepticism, his energy and reformist zeal never flagged. Perhaps, his critics have suggested, he was blind to the specter of nihilism; perhaps he never outgrew the shallow optimism of the Enlightenment. That was Thomas Mann's suspicion:

> The knotted muscles of Tolstoy bearing up the full burden of morality, Atlas-like; Strindberg, who was in hell; the martyr's death Nietzsche died on the cross of thought: it is these that inspire us with the reverence of tragedy; but in Shaw there was nothing of all this. Was he beyond such things, or were they beyond him?

Few nowadays, I imagine, can conceive of getting beyond such things. We beleaguered moderns and postmoderns are more likely to assume that anyone who laughs as incorrigibly as Shaw cannot have heard, or comprehended, the terrible news. But Shaw had heard it. He merely doubted there was anything more to be learned from it than ought to have been learned from the Albigensian Crusade, the Thirty Years War, and innumerable other episodes of murderous insanity limited in scale only by available technology. The question remained: is it likely that our culture, morality, and physiology will in one, five, ten, twenty, fifty thousand years, or as far as thought can reach, be essentially the same as today's? If not, can we learn something of fundamental importance for the present by reflecting on what they might be, or on what we want them to be? Romantic love, freedom-and-dignity, family loyalty, patriotism, and all the other sentimental illusions may be good enough—may be indispensable—for now, that is, for our species' childhood, and perhaps even for our adolescence. But are they really the last word? The fact that Shaw put these questions more explicitly and intelligibly than Nietzsche does not mean that Shaw was a greater thinker than Nietzsche any more than the fact that Mill was right about logic and ethics while Plato was wrong means that Mill was a greater philosopher than Plato. What it does mean is that Shaw was no mere fantasist and that *Back to Methuselah*—his *magnum opus*, which, thankfully, Holroyd discusses at the length, if not the depth, it deserves—is, for all its flaws, an awesome achievement and absurdly underestimated today.

Less a drama of ideas than a cosmology with characters, *Back to Methuselah* begins in the Garden of Eden and ends with humankind evolved almost beyond recognition. For all the play's ebullient exposition, including a lengthy preface, the principle of this evolution is not so easy to formulate. Matter into mind, apparently; though not in the straightforward eighteenth-century sense. Beyond good and evil, too; though what lies beyond is something more exuberant, if not much more definite, than eternal recurrence. It is the *vortex*, a more intense and concentrated form of life, refined of the all-too-human. Like previous theologians, Shaw was forced to define Godhead negatively: when we humans have outgrown our fascination with art, morality, and politics, we will have arrived at childhood's end. It may all be harmless nonsense (or sinister nonsense, as some of Shaw's critics believe), though the play's five parts are all at least charming, and sometimes haunting, fables. But the alternative, that human nature has attained its final form, is itself a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*.

Bernard Shaw is, in its way, a great achievement. It is witty, well paced, thorough, astute, elegantly written, and beautifully illustrated. Shaw is quoted aptly and copiously, as is nearly everything notable

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said in praise or disparagement of him by his contemporaries. My favorite is from Yeats's autobiography. I am not sure which category it belongs in.

> It was the prerogative of youth to take sides, and when Wilde said: "Mr. Bernard Shaw has no enemies but is intensely disliked by all his friends," I knew it to be a phrase I should never forget, and felt revenged upon a notorious hater of romance, whose courage and generosity I could not fathom. □

Alan Wolfe

A BRILLIANT MARXIST

ENGLISH QUESTIONS, by Perry Anderson. London: Verso, 1992. 370 pp. $64.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.

A ZONE OF ENGAGEMENT, by Perry Anderson. London: Verso, 1992. 384 pp. $64.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.

No Marxist writing in English is more brilliant and learned than Perry Anderson. The publication of two collections of his essays in the aftermath, not only of the collapse of communism but also the electoral defeats of European social democracy, thus becomes a test case for Marxism itself. If someone this smart cannot make Marxism work, perhaps no one can.

One thing should be clear at the start: Perry Anderson is as determined to make Marxism work as he is committed to a classic socialist political project. These essays are not experiments in introspection but exercises, however complex, in tinkering. In particular, the structure of *English Questions* is designed to test the relevance of earlier efforts at Marxist synthesis to recent events in the world. Anderson in this book combines two widely discussed essays he wrote in the 1960s—one an effort to explain the paralysis of British politics within a Marxist historiography, the other a breathtaking survey of British intellectual life—with three similar efforts written in the late 1980s. One has to credit any writer willing to allow republication of his thoughts from the 1960s. Anderson encourages us to read his earlier essays as the historical documents they surely are, which alone justifies their republication.

"The Origins of the Present Crisis" first appeared in 1964. To the degree that American intellectuals were aware of British thought at that time, they most likely knew of historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson—humanistic writers who stressed the particularities of time and place. Against them, Anderson invoked then unknown figures such as Antonio Gramsci and (a little later) Louis Althusser, as well as a vocabulary that stood in sharp contrast to more familiar writers: "Capitalist hegemony bears crucially on the working class in a specific, historically determined way in Britain." Anderson's essay accepted that Britain was exceptional in Marxist terms, but also offered an ingenious way of preserving Marxist theory. The central argument was that the British working class developed too early. Its problems stemmed, not from a lack of class consciousness, but from an excess. The culture of the British working class was so thick that it could not be universalized. Hence Britain had a *Labour* party, not a *Socialist* party, as if to suggest that the interests of workers took precedence over a universal ideal.

Writing four years later, Anderson, in "The Components of National Culture," attacked "the reactionary culture inculcated in universities and colleges, which it is one of the functions of British higher education to instill in students." This essay was a *tour d'horizon* of the British academic scene, devoted to showing how immigration from Austria (Wittgenstein, Gombrich, Klein), Poland (Malinowski, Namier, Deutscher), and Russia (Berlin) shaped a "white" intellectual culture in contrast to the more "red" immigration that affected academic life in the Americas. Shifting back and forth from art history to psychoanalysis and philosophy, Anderson concentrated mostly on sociology, arguing that Britain lacked a Durkheim and a Weber because it lacked a socialist challenge from the working class. The result was "an absent center" in British culture, which created a "chloroforming effect" on the life of the mind in a way similar to what Bagehot called the "dignified" parts of the British constitution created political stagnation. Whatever the specific argument, Anderson was also demonstrating that academic debates matter; he was trying to make his own contribution to British culture even while lamenting its state.

These essays, dazzling as they may have been, were considerably off the mark in their predictive power. The labor movement, Anderson argued in 1964, faced a great opportunity, but 1964 may, in retrospect, have been the high point of the labor movement in the postwar period. Similarly, British academic culture in the years since 1968 has proven less than reactionary and intransigent. Indeed, the academic left triumphed in a way the labor movement never did; the red brick universities are filled with oppositional humanists and social scientists who now have their turn to "inculcate" and "instill" their ideas into the minds of the students. Even sociology, whose absence was lamented in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1968, was recognized as a powerful British discipline by 1990. Anderson admits the flaws of his earlier work, blaming himself for "overstatement in critique which was also accompanied by overconfidence of cure."

Yet Anderson's self-critique is a limited one. "In my judgment," he writes in "The Figures of Descent" (1987), "the historical evidence that has accumulated over the twenty years since Edward Thompson debated with us strongly vindicates the thrust of our initial intuitions, once these are more firmly situated at the levels of particularization they require." Thompson had criticized Anderson's (and Tom Nairn's) picture of a hegemonic ruling class, just as a generation of labor historians argued that the working class was not particularly stagnant. Anderson responds by examining the social and political structure of Britain in the late 1980s. His survey convinces him that his earlier analysis, though sometimes overdrawn, was fundamentally correct: what makes Britain unique is its combination of a ruling class rooted in earlier capitalist formations (land and trade rather than manufacturing) and a working class weighed down by its own traditions.

The continuity that exists between Anderson's earlier and more recent writings lies in his belief that one can understand history and culture through the application of systematic theory. Anderson's Marxism is one in which few contingencies are allowed. Everything must have its place, every event its explanation. "[T]he history of a social class or a political movement," he writes, "cannot be dissolved into a sheer sequence of discontinuous conjectures without losing its object altogether." Marxism is superior to bourgeois theory because the latter, lacking this theoretical scope borrowed from the hard sciences, can only throw up its hands in bewilderment when events turn out other than expected. What gives Anderson's historical essays their power is the sense they convey that whatever happened had to happen. Even his most recent essays, which deal with events that no one could have foreseen, convey this self-confidence. Anderson writes as if he were right when confessing that he was wrong. At the same time, one simply has to ask what advantages there are to preserving a framework when it increasingly becomes difficult to stretch the events taking place in the world to fit it.

One way to address this question is to ask precisely which historical evidence "strongly vindicates" Anderson's approach in contrast to that of Thompson or Williams. The latter, after all, were trying to account for "The Peculiarities of the English," to use Thompson's phrase. Anderson's initial critique was determined to show that although Britain, like any society, had its peculiarities, these could still be explained with the terms of a more systematic and universal theory of history. By 1987, however, Anderson is calling for firmer "particularizations," as if greater refinement of the data of British experience will still permit the right application of a theory that tries to link class, the state, and the economy into a system. Not only has he moved closer to the position he once criticized, he also has done so precisely at the point when the British case may indeed be seen as a variant of a universal theme. Only, the theme is capitalism, not Marxism, for the Tory party, no less than Labour, has seen fit to try to integrate Britain into the rest of Europe, particularities or none.

Systematic theory is only one kind of theory, and its superiority to others has to be demonstrated, not assumed. *A Zone of Engagement* consists of Anderson's generally sympathetic treatment of writers as diverse as Marshall Berman, Michael Mann, Norberto Bobbio, Isaiah Berlin, Roberto Unger, Carlo Ginsberg, and Fernand Braudel. Each essay is remarkable for its learning, its careful reading of texts in many languages, and its combination of appreciation and critique. Yet not all these writers were systematic theorizers, and the limits of Anderson's own approach are most visible when he confronts thinkers with different objectives. Isaiah Berlin is most illustrative of this tension. In a typical tour de force, Anderson demonstrates that Kant meant something quite different by the term "the crooked timber of humanity" than Berlin suggests; turns around Berlin's famous distinction between the fox and the hedgehog and applies it critically to Berlin himself; contrasts Berlin disadvantageously to Max Weber; and questions Berlin's interpretations of Tolstoy, Herzen, Herder, Vico, and Mill. But for all the brilliance, Anderson's main charge against Berlin is that "he has not shown much interest in the juridical framework for the safeguarding of negative liberty," as if Berlin, like Hayek or Rawls, were a systematic philosopher. It is an unfair criticism. Berlin is a poet of freedom, not a constitutional theorist. Both metaphorical and systematic theories are part of the human condition; one must be a pluralist, not only in what one says, but in how one says it. There are times when both kinds of theory are necessary. But surely events since 1989 suggest that a poet of freedom may have more to offer the world than a historical schematicist.

A Zone of Engagement ends with an essay on the ends of history inspired by Francis Fukuyama's article and book. Like everything Anderson writes,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this essay is extraordinary in its range. Fukuyama, we learn, is only one of a series of writers to have advanced the "end of history" theme. Most of his readers knew that the idea came from Hegel, and some were aware of the importance of Alexandre Kojève. But Anderson reaches much further, treating us to the concept of *posthistoire* associated with Lutz Niethammer; the neglected ideas of Antoine-Augustin Cournot, who inspired Raymond Aron; the exchange of letters between Kojève and Leo Strauss on the concept; the important roles played by Henri de Man and Arnold Gehlen; an original interpretation of Jürgen Habermas as an end of history theorist; and, finally, a nuanced and very appreciative reading of Fukuyama himself. Once again, however, Anderson's critique is limited by his determination to turn everyone else into a systematic theorist. Kojève is subject to the same charge leveled against Berlin; his theory "lacks . . . any specification of property regime or constitutional structure," which meant that there existed "no conceptual barrier to stop Kojève from switching the end of his story from socialism to capitalism, without major adjustment." Habermas, who does have a systematic theory, is criticized because Anderson believes that, like Hegel, Habermas is content to see universal reason in the society of his time and place.

Anderson understands that the "end of history" thesis is really a story about the end of socialism. And for this reason he cannot accept it. By 1992 Anderson is willing to agree that there is no recognizable agent to bring about a socialist transformation: "The potential extension of social interests in an alternative to capitalism has been accompanied by a reduction in the social capacities to fight for one." He asks whether there is a realistic basis for a socialist project and concludes that "the answer is deeply ambiguous." Yet he still sees hope. Capitalism, for one, cannot stop environmental destruction. The women's movement is a significant force for change. Liberalism recovered its energy and so therefore can socialism. Anderson looks forward to "a new international agenda for social reconstruction." If it could resolve the tensions between North and South, "socialism would not so much be succeeded by another movement, as redeemed in its own right as a program for a more equal and livable world."

In a brief introduction to *A Zone of Engagement,* Anderson recounts how a 1976 essay of his on Antonio Gramsci led his friend Franco Moretti to tell him that he had written a "farewell in grand style to the revolutionary Marxist tradition." One could also read these two books as an unintentional farewell to the reformist Marxist tradition, except that Anderson will simply not go so far as to say good-bye. Instead he tries to find new reasons for the failure of the left. Writing before the 1992 defeat of the Labour party, Anderson anticipates the party's problems. But rather than blame the situation on the fact that voters seem unwilling to vote for socialism, he develops an application of his own systematic theory to account for the left's paralysis. Not only is the British state backward, so is the Labour party. It chooses its leaders in a rotten borough form and benefits from a system of disproportional representation. "The Labour establishment continues to refuse any serious commitment to either electoral reform or a written constitution." Anderson's hopes have moved from socialism in the grand tradition to advocacy for constitutionalism, yet it is by no means clear that even the latter, reformist as it may be, would offer much hope for the Labour party. Indeed, the evidence suggests that if the British state and parties were more democratic, the left would be in even worse electoral shape.

It is an axiom that collections of essays, no matter how good each one, generally make for bad books. This is decidedly not the case with Perry Anderson, although not for the reasons one might expect. Each essay is good. These books are worth reading just to see Anderson's mind at work. There is always something to be learned from the ways in which Anderson confronts other writers or specific historical experiences. What makes these essays into important books is something else: the effort to justify Marxism as a theory and socialism as a political project. Anderson offers what can be understood as an intellectual diary, a daily record keeping of reactions to some of the leading ideas and events of his time. And it is the time that makes these books so important, for although the last twenty-five years have not produced great nineteenth-century intellectual figures—Anderson sees Isaac Deutscher as the last of that form—they have produced great events.

Unfortunately, Anderson's accounts deal more firmly with ideas than with events. He is at his best when locating writers he admires in context and comparing them to each other in surprising ways. He is not as strong when he tries to account for what is taking place in the world around him. In the shortest, and in many ways the most interesting, of his essays in *English Questions,* Anderson points out that the Marxist tradition has never sufficiently understood the nature of bourgeois revolutions. Marx and Engels were so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

focused on the working class, he writes, that they "never took real cognizance of the actual political revolutions of their time that inaugurated a new epoch in the life of capital, preoccupied as they were with the prospects for another kind of revolution, one that would usher in the rule of labor but which did not in fact materialize." Writers of Anderson's generation—and mine—also began by looking for socialism. The question is whether we will be able to recognize that the major revolutionary developments of our time took place, at least in part, against the rule of the left. Our job is to figure out what those revolutions mean for our deepest beliefs. □

Ruth Rosen

STAND BY YOUR WOMAN

AGAINST THE TIDE: PRO-FEMINIST MEN IN THE UNITED STATES 1776–1990: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY, edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller. Beacon, 1992. 552 pp. $40.

After Frederick Douglass gave a rousing speech at the First Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848, the press pilloried him as an "Aunt Nancy Man," the nineteenth-century version of a "Mama's boy." When men joined women in suffrage parades, hostile crowds jeered and called them "henpecked" husbands. These men did not need to go to the woods to recover their manhood; they braved the treacherous arena of American politics.

But not so their contemporary counterparts. Men associated with the "masculinist" wing of the men's movement seek their manhood in a mythopoetic past. The search for a usable past is nothing new. In the age of identity politics, every victimized group seems to require a golden age that was destroyed by—take your pick—hordes of male barbarians or Eurocentric plunderers. Shelves of books on mythical matriarchies "prove" the existence of female-dominated societies whose peaceful, nurturing, egalitarian cultures were overrun by the shock troops of patriarchy. Still more shelves groan under the weight of Afrocentric fantasies that "document" the glories of Egypt and idealize Africa as the cradle of all that was great and good—before, that is, white European men destroyed the truly founding fathers.

The belief in a golden age can be incredibly comforting. It justifies one's sense of loss, vindicates one's victimhood. The expulsion from Eden, after all, is one of Western culture's central narratives. The problem with mythic pasts, however, is that they feed self-righteousness with historical half-truths or, even worse, lies. In search of consolation, self-proclaimed victims mourn the loss of a past that never existed in the hope that they can reinvent it as a future—always a doomed proposition. The search for an invented tradition, moreover, leads to more, not less, self-absorption and cultural and political separatism.

Such are the limits of identity politics. Cultural feminism and black nationalism share this parochial vision. And now, white, middle class men, not to be outdone by those who have blamed them for the destruction of civilization, have invented their own mythic past, a warrior tradition demolished by too much mothering and too little fathering. The immense popularity of Robert Bly's *Iron John* testifies to the hunger white, middle-class men feel to join the victim culture and enjoy what writer David Morse calls "a psychic bailout" from political responsibilities.

I confess to a certain wariness toward the men's movement ever since it emerged in the late 1960s. I first became skeptical about men's comprehension of gender equality when a young man told me, in 1968, that "women's liberation is great because women will want more sex and make fewer demands on men." In the 1970s my distrust deepened when male friends confided that their men's groups ignored the subject of women's subordination. In the 1980s I grew increasingly suspicious, when, under Robert Bly's encouragement, disgruntled middle-class men took off to the woods to drum, sniff each other's armpits, and rediscover the hirsute self within.

The men's movement, insists Bly, is not a backlash against the women's movement, but rather a male search for initiation into manhood. By finding the Wild Man within themselves, men can ostensibly heal each other and reclaim the masculinity they have lost. The women's movement, Bly argues, made many men feel guilty about their manhood. In the absence of fathers, such "soft males" lost their self-esteem (the worst thing any American can lose these days) and need to reclaim a positive masculinity.

Many feminists disagree. Susan Faludi, the author of the best-seller *Backlash*, sees Bly's meteoric ascent to guru status as part of the recoil against the women's movement. Suzanne Gordon, author of *Prisoners of Men's Dreams*, argues that "if men really want to construct a positive new vision of masculinity, they will have to move beyond hugs, tears and self-revelation." In the *New York Times Book Review*, Jill Johnston goes one step further and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insists that Bly's initiation rites "tell us something about the difficulty many men have in establishing themselves as sons of their fathers—that is, as heirs to the patriarchy."

There is an eerie commonality between cultural feminism and Bly's mythopoetic masculinity. Both assume that a loss has occurred and that only same-sex communion can heal the wound. Both the Great Mother and the Wild Man reinforce time-honored gender archetypes of men and women. Both presume that women cannot heal men and men cannot heal women. Men must go to the woods; women to their covens. Separatism is all.

It's no coincidence, I think, that Bly's promotion of the Wild Man accompanied the rise of the New Right. The antisexist wing of the men's movement understood that men must fight established power to ensure gender equality. The new masculinists instead retreated into cultural politics. Bly began leading men's conferences in 1981. In 1982, a widely reprinted interview with Keith Thompson, "What Men Really Want," set the stage for resurrecting a warrior sensibility. In 1990, Bly became a media celebrity when PBS broadcast his interview with Bill Moyers, *A Gathering of Men*. That program, in the words of one admirer, became the "Magna Carta" of the men's spirituality movement.

Let's not kid ourselves. The women's movement *did* ask men to give up real power—at home and at the workplace. The *New York Times* recently quoted a male batterer who asked, "Why should men want to change when we got it all already?" Indeed. To comply with feminists' demands, men had to move over, make room, change habits of a lifetime. But the sensitive new male, heralded during the 1970s, became an object of ridicule during the 1980s. What Susan Jeffords calls "the remasculinization of America" started even before Ronald Reagan galloped into the White House to fight the Evil Empire. The New Right's efforts to roll back the sixties, counter the "Vietnam Syndrome," and discredit feminism were partly successful. American popular culture took a sharp turn to the right, tore down Alan Alda's pedestal, and built a new one for Sylvester Stallone.

Robert Bly is hardly the first to trumpet a warning about the loss of middle-class men's masculinity. Ever since the first years of the industrial revolution, generations of social critics have worried about a "crisis in masculinity." Traditional masculinity was rooted in physical labor. As increasing numbers of men entered white-collar work, they left behind lower-class men—poorly paid, doing the dirty work, but with their masculinity intact. Repeated efforts to redefine masculinity—in the guise of the tough corporate magnate or the expert technocrat—never took hold in the American popular imagination.

Anxiety over masculinity affects all aspects of our political culture today. Sidney Blumenthal has recently argued that the lack of a strong masculine figure has kept the "Democrats wandering in search of an elixir that would transport them out of the desert and into the White House." The yearning for Cuomo, "or another natural force of aggression, is a desperate bid by Democrats for the recovery of their manly self-respect."

Blumenthal is on to something. In the age of Rambo, concerns for the poor, children, the elderly, or the planet were discredited as "soft" issues. "This sexual stereotyping," he observes, "has created a subtextual rhetoric that has proved remarkably persuasive with one group in particular: white men, especially white Protestant southern and western men." As a result, "one wing of the men's movement chats with Bill Moyers; the other operates out of the executive branch of the federal government. The Republican position on the issues is at the superficial level of its appeal; beneath that lies the implicit promise to exalt the Wild Man within."

If Blumenthal is right, then Americans are in need of an alternative to Bly's soft-focus mythopoetic past—a manly tradition rooted in the nation's political culture. American history, as it happens, is rich with real—as opposed to mythic—political traditions. One doesn't need to invent a matriarchy to learn about women's power. Reading Elizabeth Cady Stanton will teach women more than resurrecting the Great Goddess. One doesn't have to invent an Afrocentric past to acquire racial pride. Ida B. Wells, the indefatigable anti-lynching crusader of the early twentieth century, is a more valuable guide to the strengths of the African-American experience than is the study of African queens.

But what should white men read? Enter *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990,* a documentary history edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller, both longtime activists in the antisexist wing of the men's movement.

When Kimmel and Mosmiller first told women friends that they intended to compile a documentary history of men who had supported women's struggles in U.S. history, one sarcastically said, "That will surely be the shortest book in history." In fact, their search led to over one thousand documents—letters, sermons, speeches, and tracts. Some are well-known and predictable names—Frederick Douglass, Theodore Weld, Alan Alda—while others, such as Woody Guthrie and Howard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cosell, are surprises. Still others quietly worked for equality for women and never achieved recognition for their work.

Against the Tide is an inspiring, pathbreaking collection of remarkable documents—a realistic alternative to Bly's mythopoetic fantasies. True, it doesn't offer ritual. Nor does it provide men with a weekend away from women. But it does offer men a glimpse of men who braved ridicule to promote equality for women.

An excellent introduction provides a history of men's changing arguments for women's equality. During and after the American Revolution, for example, men used the logic of justice and fairness to justify women's rights. Heirs to the Enlightenment, they argued that women were born with inalienable rights that could not be violated. By the end of the nineteenth century, profeminist men appropriated the language of female reformers and insisted that women's *superior* morality required their presence in public life. If only women could vote, these men argued, women would control men's vices, end war, and put a stop to political corruption.

Between 1910 and 1930, a third wave of male supporters—anarchists, socialists, and Greenwich Village Bohemian cultural radicals—embraced feminism because in the critique of masculinity and inequality they saw the blueprint for a new society. In the words of the Greenwich Village writer Floyd Dell, feminism would make it "possible for the first time for men to be free." This position required that men do more than support women's formal rights; it meant supporting women's efforts to emancipate themselves as individuals.

The sociologist Robert Blauner has written that the antisexist men's movement often made men feel guilty for being men. Here is the antidote to that guilt. These men demonstrated the kind of bravery for which no medals are given. Ridiculed by the press as men who "ought to wear petticoats," they understood, as Todd Gitlin has noted, "that it is manly to stand up for someone else's rights."

These are times that try women's souls. Male politicians allowed Clarence Thomas to ascend to the Supreme Court; the most popular wing of the men's movement encourages men to howl in the woods. *Against The Tide*, a superbly edited history, reminds us that there exists a long and honorable tradition in which men actively championed women's causes—not as feel-good warriors but out of conviction. Many of these men would have understood the words of a contemporary feminist bumper sticker: "A Man of Quality Is Not Threatened by Women's Equality." □

Oliver Conant

ORWELL AMONG THE ACADEMICS

ORWELL: THE AUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY, by Michael Sheldon. HarperCollins, 497 pp., 1992. $15.00, paper.

Reading George Orwell tends to leave most people with an impression of knowing Orwell personally, even intimately. This is something that happens with a very few writers. It is curious that Orwell achieves this effect while disclosing very little of his intimate or personal life. For example, in his personal writings there is almost nothing about Richard Blair, his father, a minor retired colonial administrator, who all of Orwell's adult life lived on his pension in a sort of prolonged Edwardian twilight in Southwold. Orwell tells us next to nothing about his early literary ambitions, and nothing at all about his passional life. As all his biographers have noted, he was an unusually reticent man. Yet readers feel they know him and that he is, in Lionel Trilling's words, "a figure in our lives." Why?

One could argue that it is the gravity of Orwell's subject matter, chiefly his deep insight into totalitarianism, that made him into such a figure. But there have been other witnesses to the crimes of communism, and other exposers of communist lies, who cannot be so described. What is it that we know when we say we know Orwell, and know him well?

The primary sources for this knowledge are few, but unique in literature for their revelatory power. They include "A Hanging" and "Shooting An Elephant," two savage but at the same time coolly ironic accounts of Orwell's police service in colonial Burma; portions of *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier,* where he memorably describes experiences of voluntary privation and the atmosphere of his "shabby genteel" childhood; almost all of *Homage To Catalonia,* which unforgettably evokes both the elation of the Spanish revolutionary experience and its sickening betrayal by the communists; and "Such, Such Were The Joys," a posthumously published account of Orwell's deeply unhappy time at a pretentious private preparatory school. Whether he is representing himself as a cynical, overworked colonial functionary compromised by his work, an intrepid researcher into the squalid conditions of the very poor, a brave witness to the terrible history of his times, or as a lonely, fearful little boy who can't stop wetting his bed, the images impress themselves

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forcibly on the awareness. Or rather the image, singular. There is a unity to the images. The little boy, the English officer in Burma, the adventurer in the slums, the reporter for the Left Book Club, the volunteer soldier, are all manifestly a single individual, fallible in recognizable ways and in other ways deeply admirable, in all ways deeply human.

Paradoxically, it is this very humanity of Orwell's that has made him such a problem for the biographers. Since Boswell, one of the biographer's best claims to public notice has been the ability to humanize, to make familiar and personal whoever stood in need of such services, whether literary figures or statesmen or more ordinary persons. Michael Sheldon's long new biography tries to do this with Orwell. That he manages as well as he does comes as something of a surprise, given what I have said of the specialness of Orwell's standing with his readers. But in a number of other important respects *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* is deficient.

Sheldon, a professor of English at the University of Indiana, the author of a biography of the editor of *Horizon* magazine and writer Cyril Connolly, has produced an intermittently readable and informative narrative of Orwell's life, beginning with his birth in Burma in 1903 and ending in 1950 with his death, in a tuberculosis sanatorium, at the age of forty-six. It arrives in a crowded field. Before Sheldon has come *George Orwell: A Life,* by the English political theorist and historian Bernard Crick; two volumes by the team of Stansky and Abrams, *The Unknown Orwell* and *Orwell: The Transformation,* and many other studies and recollections. Further back there is George Woodcock's *The Crystal Spirit,* a fine book that combines reminiscence of the man, biography, and criticism of the entire *oeuvre*.

Sheldon offers glimpses of certain sides of Orwell's character that I think have never been brought to the attention of the public before. The chapters on Orwell's early life present the little boy of "Such, Such Were The Joys" as more eager and better at forming relations with others—his school fellows but also the adults in his world. He is shown to have benefited more from what other people had to offer, too—one of Sheldon's most remarkable observations here is that the hated wife of the headmaster of his prep school, who is shown in such a fearful light in "Such, Such Were The Joys," actually may have fostered Orwell's writing talent. This woman's favorite subject, apparently, was English, which, according to some of her pupils, she taught with "great sensitivity," preaching the "virtues of a simple straightforward style." One of her favorite techniques was to use simple passages from the Authorized Bible as models, translating them into "bad oratory or journalese to illustrate the virtues of the original model." That the tyrant Orwell pictures in his essay could have helped him "develop as a writer of English prose," and that he redeployed her trick of "translating" biblical verses in his great essay on the corruption of language, "Politics and the English Language," is very suggestive, among other things, of Orwell's relation to established authority.

Later chapters contain findings of a similar nature. In "Lost in Mandalay" and "Servant of Empire," we learn that the colonial functionary was far from being a weary, put-upon, friendless agent of a foreign tyranny facing down a sea of hostile Asians and equipped only with a derisory symbolic authority (to some extent the impression Orwell gives of the position of the Englishman in Burma in his writings). Sheldon shows us an ambitious young police officer whose immediate superiors were mostly Burmese and who, toward the end of his career, was district head of a police force "overseeing life-and-death matters for a population that was equal to a medium-sized European city," all at an age when "his old friends from Eton were still struggling to complete their university degrees."

Sheldon's narrative thread frays badly in the long middle portion of the book. The details of Orwell's contracts, his relations to the journalistic and literary world of London—none of it makes very enlivening reading. Not all of it is boring—it boggles the mind, for example, to learn that Orwell had once proposed to write a biography of Mark Twain for an American publisher. Not surprisingly, he was turned down, but what a book that would have been! Interest picks up a bit in the sections on Spain, where Sheldon has uncovered a secret police report that Orwell and his wife were indeed in grave danger during their last weeks in Spain, wanted as "known Trotskyists," a charge that may not have been extraditable (as Orwell wryly observed) but that in Republican Spain meant jail or worse.

The last chapters suffer from the same diminution in interest. Orwell's way of life did not change radically once he attained literary fame. Not much new is said about the painful end of his life, the race to finish *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* his deathbed second marriage to Sonia Brownwell. In fairness to Sheldon it should be said that he greatly expands the very little that had been known about Orwell's relation with women throughout his life and especially his first marriage, to Eileen Maud O'Shaughnessy. O'Shaughnessy herself emerges in Sheldon's account as an exceptional person, something that previous biographers have failed to do for her. The single most revealing glimpse of Orwell in the latter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

part of this book occurs after her unexpected death from routine surgery. Orwell decided to hire a nursemaid for his adopted son, Richard, then in his infancy. Sheldon writes that the young woman he hired, Susan Watson, remembered that he asked her almost nothing about her background or experience with children: his sole test for her suitability was to ask her to help him give Richard a bath—and to ask, suddenly, "You will let him play with his thingummy, won't you?" to which she gave the correct reply, "Yes of course."

Offering such charming, unexpected glimpses of Orwell at his most unguarded and human, especially in domestic contexts, is clearly part of Sheldon's goal; as he says, he will try to "provide some sense of the human character behind the public face." The trouble with this is that Orwell's public face *was* his human face. The public face was not a mask covering up his humanity; it was like a mask only in the sense that it was a construction, a work of art continuous with his writing.

That is why more than a few of Sheldon's "discoveries," although interesting, don't convince the reader that Orwell's humanity is being revealed in any important way. Sheldon makes much of a letter that Cyril Connolly received from Orwell when they were both at Eton. In it Orwell, or rather the young Blair, speaks of being "gone on" a younger boy whom both he and Connolly found attractive, and pleads with Connolly not to be too "proprietary" with the younger boy. Connolly makes it clear that his interest in the boy is sexual in nature; he says he has been too busy with yet another boy to look on him as "anything more than an exploitable sideline who might perhaps gratify my peculiarly sensual moods." Orwell alludes to the erotic maneuverings of other boys and implies that he has felt attachments before to other boys. So there is no particular reason not to suppose that he too may have had sexual thoughts for the boy he was "gone on," that that's what "gone on" meant. On the other hand, there is not much reason to think that he did, and none at all to suppose that he acted on such feelings. Sheldon acknowledges that "it would be unwise to assume that his adolescent affections for other boys ever reached an advanced stage of sexual contact." It all begins to seem a fuss about nothing. Sheldon makes an attempt to give the episode resonance in Orwell's later life by suggesting that his guilt over his attraction to his own sex might go toward explaining his use of such opprobrious terms as "Nancy boys" for homosexuals, "particularly in the 1930s." Oddly, Sheldon does not explain that Orwell applied the term to the homosexual Auden and his circle of poets, at that time at the height of their influence, an influence he deplored. Not because it was a homosexual influence—as it happened he greatly admired Oscar Wilde—but on political grounds. Sheldon is on very weak ground here, and he seems to know it. He drops the whole subject and makes no further allusions, either to homosexual inclinations or to what we would today call homophobia on Orwell's part.

Trumpeting this letter as one of a series of "previously unknown" documents does not say much for Sheldon's powers of discrimination. Although Sheldon is clearly an industrious biographer, he often appears to have very little sense of the difference between pertinent and trivial information. When he mentions that Orwell spent time at a sanatorium in England called Preston Hall he can't resist the opportunity to go on and on about it: "Preston Hall was a progressive place with a first-rate staff and pleasant surroundings. The main part of the hospital was housed in an enormous country house built in 1849 by a railway millionaire." And if it had been torn down in 1856 by a beer baron, and remodeled in 1893 by a steel magnate, I suppose Sheldon would tell us that too. This mania for minutiae, for the verifiable fact however unimportant, is a recognizable feature of modern American academic biography, and I am afraid Sheldon has a bad case of it.

A far more dismaying feature of the genre is the extraordinary unwillingness on the part of its practitioners to engage in literary critical judgments. Instead of judgments of the merits of Orwell's books, Sheldon offers paraphrase. Where an author is obscure in his language an intelligent paraphrase can be invaluable; Orwell, however, whose writings have always been esteemed for their lucidity, is not such an author. Look in Sheldon's index under the titles *Keep The Aspidistra Flying, Coming Up For Air,* even *Animal Farm,* and one finds, close by the invariable "reviews of" or "sales of," the little heading "plot of." The presence in a book such as this of so much needless paraphrase is a scandal. It is an indication of its failure to even begin to do what a definitive study should do.

The judgments Sheldon does hazard are, frequently, absurdly timorous, or just plain absurd. About *Keep The Aspidistra Flying,* a minor novel of Orwell's (I'm deliberately concentrating now on lesser works, where one would think even a critic as cautious as Sheldon might feel free to say what he thinks) Sheldon ventures bravely that it will "always have a certain appeal." But wait—there is another tantalizing reference to *Keep The Aspidistra Flying:*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the index, under *Burmese Days,* Orwell's first novel, we find "*Keep The Aspidistra Flying,* compared with." Turn to the page indicated and what do we find? Not Sheldon's comparison, but Cyril Connolly's, in a review of *Burmese Days*. He thought *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* was "inferior" to *Burmese Days,* and said so. That's how those fellows talked in those days, before the availability of useful phrases like "a certain appeal."

The contrast between the judgments—multiple, witty, severe—that sparkle and flash in almost everything Sheldon quotes of Orwell and Sheldon's own habits of thought would be comic were it not in the end somewhat painful to witness. One cannot read a man missing the point over and over again without beginning to feel sorry for him. Sheldon would probably be greatly surprised by anyone finding anything pitiable in his performance. For Sheldon lives in a world that no longer has the desire or the capacity to expect anything more from biography or from criticism than just the sort of thing that he abundantly and laboriously provides here. His publishers and editors do not; the reviewers of his book do not; his colleagues and his dean do not; and if, as they do not, most readers do not, who is to say, something better is needed, or to act on the demand?

Orwell: The Authorized Biography shows that there is almost nothing modern American academic biography can do for George Orwell, except what modern American academic biography does for all of its subjects: accumulate and sort minutiae, document contract negotiations, summarize the critical estimate of others. It is unable to do more. Sheldon's book, for all its goodheartedness, its charming glimpses and its clearly having been written from the laudatory impulse to honor Orwell, fails to qualify as a *necessary* book about Orwell, much less a great or definitive one. Perhaps more time needs to pass before such a book can be written. In any event, Orwell still awaits the biographer his stature requires. □

Jean Bethke Elshtain

BEFORE I'LL BE A SLAVE. . . .

FREEDOM: FREEDOM IN THE MAKING OF WESTERN CULTURE, by Orlando Patterson. Basic Books, 1991. $29.95. 487 pp.

No small projects for Orlando Patterson. *Freedom* is grand in scope, heartfelt, and refreshingly old-fashioned. By that I mean Patterson offers a "grand narrative" of the sort now under sustained attack in many quarters, and the very fact that it is so thoroughly compelling reminds us of what we have lost.

Patterson's thesis is robust: the West holds and has held the value of freedom as central. Most non-Western cultures thought little of the notion; indeed, many had no word for it in the Western sense. The story of freedom, for Patterson, is the story of a persistent struggle through which freedom is defined in relation to a condition of unfreedom—slavery and later forms of servitude. His dominant explanatory device is a master-slave dialectic whose dynamics Patterson discerns (no doubt with Hegel in mind) in classical antiquity.

The complexity for Patterson is that the existence of slavery cannot account for the Western devotion to freedom. Many non-Western societies were slave societies. The Arab slave trade, for example, preceded that of the West and continued after slavery was abolished in the West. So what is particular to the West that we made of freedom "our most important cultural value"?

Patterson defines his work by noting the four questions it will attempt to answer. These are: "First, how and why was freedom initially constructed as a social value? Second, how and why, after having been invented, did it emerge as the supreme value distinct from any number of other important values? Third, why did this rise to cultural supremacy happen only in the Western world, and for so many centuries remain confined to this civilization? Finally, having achieved preeminence, what forces maintained its status as the core value of Western civilization throughout the course of its history?"

How well has Patterson succeeded? One's evaluation of this question will be determined in part by the stance one takes toward Patterson's unpacking of the *negative* case—the "stillbirth of freedom in the non-Western world." I found Patterson's discussion both problematic and persuasive. He seems to be arguing along these lines: slavery generates freedom *except* where it does not. And that "does not" is a big category—all non-Western societies. The West is different in that slavery, operating through a complex negative dialectic, served to generate its antinomy—freedom—but in a nuanced and differentiated way that permits no grand, cataclysmic synthesis. In other words, Patterson offers the story of a centuries-old and continuing struggle. "Freedom began its career as a social value in the desperate yearning of the slave to negate what, for him or her, and for nonslaves, was a peculiarly inhuman condition."

Patterson calls freedom a "chordal" concept with many tones and registers. Analytic and moral

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

philosophers might describe freedom as an essentially contested concept, one whose meaning will always be somewhat unsettled and around which political and social contests will rage. The three strong notes in the chord, for Patterson, are "personal, sovereignal, and civic freedom." Personal freedom means not being coerced by another. Sovereignal freedom is the capacity to do as one pleases insofar as one can. Civic freedom is participation in the life of governance. Patterson attempts to view freedom from the "bottom up," hence his protracted argument from the negative—slavery generates freedom. The "desire for personal freedom" he finds lurking even in preliterate "primitive beginnings," such as the Tupinamba peoples of pre-European South America who enslaved others and who eventually killed and ate those they enslaved. The slave, knowing the inevitability of the outcome, exhibited a "desperate yearning for escape and freedom."

Patterson asserts a longing so basic and fundamental as to acquire near ontological status. Not all would be masters if they could, he suggests, but all—every man and woman—would not be slaves. Confinement, imprisonment, enchaining—these no human being seeks. Where does this negative impulse come from? Not wanting to court the ritual hue and cry against essentialist assumptions and argumentation, Patterson speaks of a socially constructed idea, not a "natural one." But, in fact, his claims are so strong as to imply an urge that overflows the boundaries of social constructionism. Why does the slave not merely acquiesce? If freedom is *not* a value (for example, in Tupinamba society where slavery never ripened into its opposite), how and why does the slave experience his or her condition as a fundamental violation?

Perhaps there *is* something peculiar to human beings that pushes us toward rattling, even seeking escape from the cage. What makes human beings unique is that we can write books about it and build societies and constitutions on an edifice constructed out of our own most profound yearnings; thus, "incipient or proto-civic freedom, then, is found in the most primitive of social formations having freedom." Full civic freedom requires what comes later in Western history—a politically centralized community. But the seeds were sown at the beginning. That many societies are resistant to freedom as a complex "chordal" value does not stay Patterson's hand as he claims that "the promotion of freedom as a value was the natural thing to do for most human societies."

His overall thesis can be summed up in a few words: one finds slavery without freedom, but one never finds freedom without slavery as a precursor. Personal freedom is nowhere actualized in the non-Western world. Only when nonslaves value freedom, clearly, do slaves get a hankering for it, as it is the nonslave who is the first to experience freedom as a value. That is, when the value of freedom is upheld as a clearly constructed contrast to unfreedom, then and only then does the "master-slave dialectic" arise as slaves begin to yearn to negate their condition. Hence, freedom was a value for slaves and women in ancient Greece for it was precisely what they lacked. Patterson's case seems a bit thin here as he relies on what might be called "negative evidence." This comes down to little documentation of a tangible sort, but is grounded, instead, on a series of "must have beens." In other words, his argument proceeds in and through the proliferation of counterfactuals. The fact that something is not mentioned or noted constitutes a form of evidence the historian and sociologist must interpret.

Perhaps Patterson's most controversial move is to argue that men were the creators of civic freedom and women the preeminent bearers of the idea of personal freedom. Women came to value personal freedom because of their "empathy with the slave condition." The average woman of the sixth and fifth centuries, BCE, when viewing the slave, must have murmured, "There but for the gods and goddesses go I." We don't know this, but we can safely presume it, Patterson claims. The Greek male, on the other hand, including the male slave, was impressed by the "power and enhancement of the master." Men envied those above; women empathized with those below. This is no doubt too tidy by far, and Patterson admits that the language of freedom in its tripartite personal, sovereignal, and civic meanings did not yet exist by the end of the sixth century BCE, yet freedom "as a social value" was already "well in existence."

By the end of the fifth and throughout the fourth century, freedom had become a universal value, but its three elements were rated differently depending upon whether one was a citizen, a slave, a male, or a female. For example: one man's sovereignal freedom could spur another's yearning for personal freedom or lead intellectuals (Stoics, Sophists) to invent another category—inner or spiritual freedom—which would go on to become part of an "endless dialectic between social processes, social thought, and intellectual reflection." Patterson introduces the concept of spiritual freedom as an inner realm or sphere, created in opposition to an external realm but different from the abstract intellectual freedom cherished by the likes of a Plato.

Rome brings much of the irony of the ancient

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world full circle, universalizing freedom in part because it institutionalized a large-scale slave system. At the same time, the Roman nobility enhanced and fleshed out the notion of civic freedom or libertas, an "elite conception of civic freedom." But the same tripartite version of freedom persists, taking on its particular manifestations throughout the Roman world and culminating in the accession of personal freedom as "the supreme value of the vast majority of the city that ruled civilized Europe, including its working and elite women."

This, in turn, paves the way for Christianity—humankind's "only universal religion of freedom." Where Stoicism had failed its adherents through over-intellectualization divorced from "the method of faith," Christianity pushed the *credo ut intelligam*: one must believe in order to understand. Patterson takes seriously the early Christian claim that its savior came that they "might have life and might have it more abundantly." Perhaps one can expect no tangible earthly rewards, but one can create a community based on *agape,* brotherly and sisterly love. God is softened—becoming "Abba" or "Daddy," thus undermining older terms of exclusion and hierarchy. In surrender to God, paradoxically, lies the mystery of freedom and the "good news" of a liberation from the social contract of late antiquity.

Continuing to think against the grain, Patterson insists that it is a "gross misconception" to launch broadsides against the early church for failing, somehow, to stop slavery. For slavery was, by then, a terrifying part of the human condition, and the Christians were unique in refusing to justify slavery: "Once you were a slave/Now you are fee." This elemental freedom is freedom from enslavement to sin and freedom to be active in our own behalf, even to disobedience to earthly powers. Paul is extolled for his great "emphasis on personal spiritual freedom as a universal value." Patterson interprets the Christian insistence that all human freedom is bound to be conditional by exploring Paul's complex and highly original use of the Roman concept of "sovereignal freedom": no man can ever be an absolute master—that is idolatry, an attempt to usurp God's role. Although Patterson's reading of Augustine is rather cursory and disappointing in contrast to the richness of his treatment of Paul, his willingness to try to situate the early Christians in their own time and to locate them as part of the great and terrible drama of freedom is admirable and, within the contemporary academy, iconoclastic.

I don't often review a book by offering a decocted précis, but that seemed the best tack to take with an effort as grand in design as Patterson's. I do, of course, have a list of concerns and caveats. First, Patterson's notion of sovereignal freedom includes little sense of freedom from imposition by an external force, the political and legal expression of which is nationalism. I presume he will get to this vexation in the promised second volume. Second, I wonder if one really can so readily separate the value of freedom from the concepts we use to capture that value. Are we really talking about the "same" phenomenon? Third, Patterson's cursory dismissal of Isaiah Berlin's classic work on liberty seems misplaced. Berlin, remember, was writing out of a recognition of the terrible price millions of ordinary men and women paid when a particular form of positive or utopian freedom gripped whole societies in its maw. Here, too, I hope Patterson tends to the realization that absolute freedom yields its (only) apparent opposite, absolute terror. Finally, however, one can only urge this book on all fairminded readers. Patterson resists the trendy insistence that we can make no judgments as between cultures and ways of life, and he is prepared to offer a powerful exemplary tale of freedom as a drama of history played out in many contexts, many places, with many faces. He plays the whole chord in this book, and there is genuine power in the way he draws things to a close:

> Individually liberating, socially energizing, and culturally generative, freedom is undeniably the source of Western intellectual mastery, the engine of its extraordinary creativity, and the open secret of the triumph of Western culture, in one form or another, over the other cultures of mankind. The facts that, today, almost all peoples embrace the ideal of personal freedom, whatever their actual practice, and that many have come to define the value as instinctively human in order to deny its essentially Western origins are telling testimony to its overpowering appeal and inherent goodness.

Fred Block

FUTURE OF THE WELFARE STATE

THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY: CLASS BASES OF THE EUROPEAN WELFARE STATE 1875–1975, by Peter Baldwin. Cambridge University Press, 1990. 353 pp. $22.95 paper.

CRISIS AND CHOICE IN EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, by Fritz W. Scharpf, translated by Ruth Crowley and Fred Thompson. Cornell University Press, 1991. 303 pp. $49.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

The end of the Cold War should mean the end of the illusion that "free market capitalism" and communism are the only choices for a developed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

economy. The experiences of advanced European welfare states show that there are many more possibilities for producing an efficient economy than were ever dreamt of by Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Yet at this historical turning point, European social democracy is in crisis. Hence, it is vital to understand more about the origins of the advanced welfare states, their successes and failures.

Peter Baldwin's book, *The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875–1975*, represents both the best and the worst of contemporary scholarship. Baldwin offers a meticulous analysis of the development of old-age pension policies in Sweden, Denmark, England, France, and Germany over an entire century. His mastery of the literature—including archival sources and parliamentary debates—for five different countries is extraordinary. His book is also theoretically ambitious: his goal is to challenge the familiar story that advanced European welfare states with universalistic social programs were put in place by social democratic politicians and their trade union allies against strenuous bourgeois opposition. He argues persuasively that the first "universalist, egalitarian, tax-financed" social policies came about in Sweden primarily in response to the interests of farmers in a period when the social democrats had not yet become a major political force. He goes on to show that the political struggles in these countries over the nature of old-age pensions cannot be grasped in simple class terms, but that there are shifting alliances among different social groups.

But Baldwin claims too much for his fine-grained treatment of old-age provision; both his title and his conclusion leap from the specific policy arena to the broader issue of the social welfare state. Although he is certainly correct to emphasize that the social interpretation of the rise of advanced European welfare states needs to pay more attention to class alliances, political strategies, and the legacies of previous reforms, the reality remains that in several countries, and particularly in Sweden, social democrats did succeed in linking universalist social welfare policies, full-employment policies, and centralized union bargaining to create an advanced welfare state. The nuances of Baldwin's arguments about old-age pensions do not call this achievement into question.

The advanced European welfare states are the starting point for Fritz Scharpf's analysis in *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy*. His project is to compare social democratic strategies in Austria, Sweden, Germany, and England in the period from the first OPEC oil price increase in 1973 through the mid-1980s. Scharpf relies on careful comparison; he first provides a country-by-country narrative of the efforts to maintain price stability and full employment in the more hostile international economic environment of this period. He then analyzes the institutional factors that contributed to success in some countries and failure in others. Here, he pushes well beyond the literature on "corporatism" to capture the specific elements of the Austrian case that helped that country to achieve enough wage restraint year after year so that high levels of private employment could be maintained.

Scharpf's core message is that policy does matter—that government initiatives can reconcile full employment, higher wages, and continued economic growth in a market economy. However, he recognizes that it is not easy, and he is appreciative of many of the ingenious Swedish initiatives that allowed them to balance these goals through much of the post–World War II period. He emphasizes particularly the importance of the solidaristic wage policy with its centralized wage bargaining, the use of public-sector surpluses to fund private investment, and the active labor-market policy that emphasized retraining of employees.

As his analysis comes up to the present, Scharpf becomes substantially more pessimistic about the practicability of social democratic policies. The turning point for him is the shift toward high interest rates in the United States at the beginning of the Reagan administration. In combination with the growing integration of international financial markets, high interest rates forced European countries to pursue tighter monetary policies to keep their own interest rates high. Countries that tried to resist this trend were likely to experience huge capital outflows and forced currency devaluations. Moreover, with these high interest rates, governments had to assure firms higher rates of return on their business activity or they would not bother to invest in productive activities.

> As capital markets became internationalized and the international level of interest rates was raised, the terms of trade between capital, labor, and government shifted in favor of the capital side. For that reason any attempt to maintain or restore full employment in the private sector in the early 1980s had to be paid for by a massive redistribution in favor of capital incomes. The only question was who would pay this price and how.

In this new environment, he argues, the best that social democratic governments can hope to achieve are two out of the three goals of full employment, rising wages, and expanding social services. His own preference is for policies that maintain full

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

employment and high levels of state spending while allowing real wages to decline. Here again, policies matter, since both Reagan and Thatcher met none of these three goals, and even well-intentioned governments can end up with similarly dismal results. In fact, the argument that he originally published in German in 1987 anticipated the growing crisis of Swedish social democracy; he foresaw that the weakening of centralized wage bargaining would make it increasingly difficult for the Swedish Social Democrats to achieve any of their historic goals.

Scharpf recognizes that the only way out of the current impasse is the elaboration of new international economic arrangements that would insulate Europe from the pressures of the international capital markets and from economic choices made in Washington. However, he is hardly sanguine about this; he is not optimistic that European economic integration will make possible the pursuit of a continent-wide policy of full employment.

In the end, Scharpf's analysis suggests the irony that the future of European social democracy may be written in Washington. If U.S. policy continues in its post-1980 direction, European social democrats will be limited to second- and third-best options. As long as U.S. policy encourages the integration and growth of international financial markets, then long-term interest rates are likely to remain high. Investors will continue to avoid long-term investments in favor of the much higher returns available from speculative investments in asset markets. The high interest rates mean, in turn, that the terms of trade throughout the world will continue to favor capital, undermining the possibilities for progressive social and economic policies. Moreover, even in periods of recession, when the Federal Reserve cuts short-term interest rates to stimulate the U.S. economy, there is little relief abroad. Long-term rates are remaining stubbornly high, and the weakness of demand in the U.S. further discourages expansionary monetary or fiscal policies abroad.

On the other hand, a shift in policy in Washington could open the way for a new period of creative social democratic experimentation abroad. What is needed are policies that would shift resources out of speculative investments that promise big capital gains in the short term. This could be done by substantially increasing capital gains taxes on assets held less than three or five years. The available funds could then be redirected into financial instruments that would be used to finance spending on public infrastructure,the production of affordable housing, improving the education and training of the population, and civilian-oriented research and development. Such policies could both restore the health of the U.S. economy and lower long-term interest rates internationally. A small dose of social democracy in the United States seems now to be a precondition for large doses of social democracy abroad. □

Michael B. Katz

THE POVERTY DEBATE

THE NEW POLITICS OF POVERTY: THE NON-WORKING POOR IN AMERICA, by Lawrence Mead. Basic Books, 1992. 356 pp. $25.00.

In 1986 Lawrence Mead catapulted to prominence with the publication of *Beyond Entitlement,* which argued for enforcing work obligations on welfare recipients. Used widely to support federal workfare, the book's lasting significance lay in the intellectual foundation it provided for contemporary conservatism. Unlike Charles Murray, whose *Losing Ground* (1984) argued for reducing the scope and responsibilities of the state, Mead developed a conservative defense of big government. Government, in his view, should assume more, rather than less, responsibility; only a strong federal government could reverse the slide into permanent dependence and social pathology in America's inner cities.

In his new book, *The New Politics of Poverty: The Non-Working Poor in America,* Mead blends these arguments into a provocative account of recent political history. The withdrawal of many blacks from "mainstream institutions," asserts Mead, amounts to an "internal secession . . . no less threatening to the country than the more formal rupture in 1861." As in the first Civil War, the GOP is leading the "new battle for integration."

Although Mead's metaphor of a second Civil War is preposterous, he is right that an unprecedented crisis exists within America's inner cities. This is his challenge to the political left, which has retreated before the issue of race, advocated ineffectual public policies, and failed to develop a compelling explanation of the situation within inner cities. Mead makes a five-part argument:

1. "Nonwork" is the major cause of a new form of poverty. Young African-American men and single mothers constitute the overwhelming number of the new poor.

2. Neither economic trends, racism, segregation, inadequate child care, nor other tangible obstacles explain the emergence of the new poverty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

3. Instead, the new poverty's roots lie in psychology, culture, and human nature.

4. As a response to the new poverty, a new politics of dependency based on "social and personal" issues has emerged to replace the old, redistributive politics of class.

5. At its most constructive, the new politics of dependency realizes that only public policy that utilizes the authority of the state to enforce acceptable behavior can alleviate the new poverty.

These are serious arguments, which Mead documents with abundant footnotes to social science and policy literature. But are they correct? The answer could drive domestic politics and shape social policy for the next generation.

Poverty among the working-aged, Mead correctly observes, is "in the first instance" an "employment problem." Today, few full-time workers fall below the poverty line. This represents a relatively new situation, because throughout much of American history low wages and irregular work meant that employment alone did not lift most workers out of poverty. Despite the improved rewards of work, what Mead calls "nonwork" has increased, especially among minorities. Among the working-aged, it is the primary source of poverty. Furthermore, he asserts, it is largely voluntary.

Mead identifies "nonwork" with young black men and single mothers. He is right about the men; rates of joblessness among them have risen to astonishing proportions. However, as Mead's own tables show, his contention about single mothers is incorrect. According to his statistics, the percentage of single female heads who did not work at all in 1959 was 57.1 and in 1989, 58.4, virtually the same. What increased was the absolute number of single mothers. Without qualifications, Mead's argument that "nonwork" has increased among poor household heads also misleads because many more single women now head poor households. This demographic shift accounts for most of the increased "nonwork" among single mothers since the 1950s. Although single mothers themselves work no less often than they did in 1959, it should be noted that the number of them receiving welfare (AFDC) declined from 63 percent in 1972 to about 45 percent in 1988, an inconvenient statistic unreported by Mead.

Mead's case rests partly on curious omissions and slippery language. He points out the rise in the number of hours worked between 1973 and 1988 and the increase in the number of people working during old age, which he interprets as evidence of a heightened work ethic that separates ordinary Americans from the nonworking poor. His explanation, which rests solely on character, ignores falling real wages, inflation, court decisions about retirement, and other factors that propel or permit people to work longer hours and more years, such as those referred to by Juliet Schor in *The Overworked American*. "Nonwork" appears voluntary because Mead calls it "withdrawal" from the labor force. Descriptions that apply to some young black men and single mothers denigrate a much larger group because Mead applies them to the "poor," which gives his argument a nasty racial edge.

Mead castigates poor blacks not only for "nonwork" but also for their inability to hold a job. Although he argues that blacks—all blacks—are more likely than whites to quit their jobs, his footnote calls the evidence equivocal, and the study on which he relies refers only to black men. Elsewhere he contends, "Blacks work at much lower rates than whites no matter where they live," only, two pages later, to contradict himself by pointing to the underrepresentation of black male household heads among the long-term jobless and the propensity of black single mothers to "work their way off welfare" as often as whites.

Out of this melange of misinterpreted statistics, slippery evidence, and contradiction emerges one fact that cannot be disputed: the extraordinary jobless rate among black young men. The issue is how to interpret it. Mead dismisses all structural arguments. He denies that jobs are in short supply. If the able-bodied unemployed wanted jobs, Mead believes, they could find them quickly. After all, black male unemployment continued to rise during the prosperous 1980s.

Relatively high unemployment accompanied the prosperity and job creation of the 1980s because structural changes in the economy kept the labor market for unskilled workers slack. One exception proves the rule: the tight labor market in Boston during the 1980s. Researchers discovered that abundant jobs and reasonable wages drew many who had been thought unemployable into the labor force and dramatically reduced unemployment. Certainly, a significant fraction still remained hard to reach and outside the labor market. Concentrating on them, Mead discounts the Boston experience, except as evidence for his argument for the irrelevance of job supply to the "nonwork" problem. Most researchers, however, draw the opposite conclusion. Harvard economist Richard Freeman, drawing on the Boston experience, concludes that "employment of black

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

youths is particularly sensitive to the state of the local labor market." Also writing of Boston, MIT economist Paul Osterman observes, "Full employment does in fact deliver many of the benefits its advocates have promised."

Mead argues that the initial jobs young blacks get are as good as those of whites. However, "Between 1973 and 1989," concludes the most authoritative report on the subject, "the earnings of young black males deteriorated relative to whites." In fact, the best available evidence, *Why Black Men Are Doing Worse in the Labor Market: A Review of Supply-Side and Demand-Side Explanations,* by Philip Moss and Chris Tilly (Social Science Research Council, 1991), documents the declining labor-market fortunes of black men. The situation emerges as even worse than Mead describes because wage differentials between black and white men have widened since the mid-1970s, and even controlling for education does not substantially reverse the relative earning decline of blacks, which was most severe among the college educated and high-school dropouts. Since the 1970s, moreover, the rate of black college entry has declined.

Mead dismisses the growth of part-time work in the 1980s as evidence of job shortage because most part-time work, he asserts, is voluntary. Here, too, the data fail to support his case. Government statistics show a long-term increase in both voluntary and involuntary part-time work. In 1957, one out of every eight workers was part-time and 80 percent of these were voluntary. In 1991, one in five were part-time and two-thirds voluntary. Between 1979 and 1989, one-third of the increase in part-time work consisted of workers who wanted full-time work. The rise in involuntary part-time workers between 1989 and 1992, 1.5 million, rivals the number of workers, 2 million, who lost their jobs. Involuntary part-time workers, of course, are the most likely to lack health benefits and to live in poverty.

The availability of jobs constitutes only one obstacle to "nonwork" that Mead dismisses. Another is low wages. Mead distinguishes between the reasons for low wages and those for "nonwork." The growth of income inequality, he contends, has no connection to poverty. This argument assumes that the growth of concentrated, persistent poverty in America's cities bears no relation to the forces that, at the same time, restructured their labor markets and lowered wages. Mead gives no good reasons for dismissing the evidence of economists, such as Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, who find a close association between the forces depleting good jobs and those driving wages down.

Both "deindustrialization" and an assault on the "social wage" began in earnest after 1973 as employers confronted international competition and falling profits. One consequence was the rise in the number of working poor. Between 1973 and 1984, the poverty rate for full-time adult male workers grew 45 percent. To argue for a dissociation between falling real wages and poverty is to live in a fantasy land.

Mead also argues that employment discrimination has dropped to negligible levels. Two recent studies provide powerful evidence that contradicts this assessment. In interviews with employers in Chicago, Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn Neckerman encountered open reluctance to hire young black men among firms of all types and sizes. In a recent study, the Urban Institute sent carefully matched black and white men in Chicago and Washington, D.C., to apply for the same jobs. The whites received job offers much more often than the blacks. Although Mead admits that employers frequently do remain unwilling to hire black men, he contends their refusal reflects unfavorable prior experience, not racism. But if employers, for whatever reason, refuse to hire black men, then "nonwork" is not nearly so voluntary as Mead implies.

Does the location of jobs in suburbs create insurmountable difficulties for inner-city residents (the mismatch theory)? Or is Mead correct that the location of jobs doesn't matter because anyone who really wants to work will find a way to get there? It might be thought that the expense of car ownership, transportation, and the hostility blacks face in suburbs would provide common-sense answers to this question. But the social scientists who have tried to find quantitative ways of measuring the relation between the location of home and jobs have given equivocal responses, although the best evidence provides some support for the mismatch theory. Mead, however, will have none of this. The mismatch theory, he contends, overlooks the fact that population has left cities faster than jobs, thereby creating plenty of opportunity for work. He provides no source for this assertion, and his discussion of the spatial mismatch theory itself considers only bus routes, not the cost of transportation. His sole evidence for costs is from WIN (federal workfare) programs in which clients spent "only" 7 percent of their budgets on transportation, a figure that, on a minimum wage or other low income, does not strike me as insignificant. In the end, Mead undercuts his case by admitting that spatial mismatch might be a problem in depressed Eastern and Midwestern cities. This, of course, is precisely where the problem is worst. Nor does he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

discuss the most interesting direct evidence on the question: the Gattreaux "experiment" in the Chicago area. As a result of a court order, inner-city single mothers moved into housing in mainly white suburbs where jobs happened to be much more available. Their work rate rose dramatically, far exceeding that of their counterparts who remained in the inner city.

Mead also tries to dismiss the lack of available child care as a cause of nonwork among single mothers. Most women, he assumes, "probably" find affordable and satisfactory child care because so many of them rely on their relatives. He does not consider the elasticity of the supply of relative-based care or the impact of the increasing proportion of working women on the availability of relatives to provide child care. Mead discounts mothers' statements that finding child care is difficult, which, he claims with no reasons, cannot be taken at "face value." As evidence for his position, Mead has only two 1979 studies that claim that increasing the availability of child care would produce at best a 10 percent rise in work effort by women.

Nor are low wages a real obstacle to work by single mothers. In every state, single mothers, he claims, can support two children above the poverty line without welfare. His source is a study by the conservative Heritage Foundation, and his calculations omit the cost and availability of medical insurance. Later he discounts the importance of medical insurance in deterring women from taking jobs without medical benefits. His whole discussion begs the question by not figuring out what women would have to earn to match the combination of medical benefits, food stamps, and other assistance available through welfare and then comparing it to the wages they could expect to earn. Here he neglects much careful, empirical work on the topic that contradicts his assertion by showing how the structure of welfare makes work disadvantageous for poor mothers and how unlikely they are to earn enough to escape poverty.

Dismissing commonly asserted causes for "nonwork," Mead offers his own explanation, which is rooted in human nature and culture. "The culture of black America is the most significant for an understanding of today's nonwork and poverty. . . . Evidently, the worldview of blacks makes them uniquely prone to the attitudes contrary to work, and thus vulnerable to poverty and dependency." Mead can offer no evidence for this assertion, which, in fact, is contradicted by his own data showing the underrepresentation of black male household heads among the jobless as well as by abundant historical evidence.

Mead grounds his cultural explanations in historical distortions. Because group memories of slavery and Jim Crow, he contends, induced lasting hopelessness and passivity, blacks responded to prejudice in a distinctive way. Unlike white immigrant groups facing discrimination, they didn't start their own enterprises or even flee the South. Instead, they "remained dependent on the white man, both economically and psychologically." It's not that whites have failed to try to teach blacks independence. "Black history since then [the end of slavery] can be seen as a high-pressure education in an economically achieving way of life." When blacks are not dependent, they are slow learners. Mead attacks black capacity relentlessly. "Until recently, blacks have played a much smaller role in the institution where other groups find their economic base—the private economy." Could that great private American institution, the southern plantation, have functioned without them? Strictly speaking, blacks have made less money in the private sector, but failure to draw attention to the legal barriers, social customs, and violence that excluded them from the private economy is not only incomplete; it reinforces stereotypes of black inferiority.

So do the other items omitted from Mead's skewed history. Among these, the most important is the contrasting experience of blacks and white immigrants, which refutes Mead's attempts to blame blacks for not following the path to upward mobility trod by Europeans who came to the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Other significant historical omissions include legal restrictions on their mobility in the South, *de jure* segregation, state-sanctioned violence, lynching, and the racism that excluded them from unions and manufacturing jobs in the North. Dependence does not capture the spirit of poor, former slaves who in the years after the Civil War matched from their own resources the money given by white philanthropy to build schools. It does not fit the origins of the Civil Rights movement in the rural South or its subsequent history. Passivity does not explain why African-Americans' rates of school attendance remained so high in early twentieth-century cities. The list could go on. Mead has resurrected Sambo, Mammy, and Uncle Tom and held them responsible for "welfare queens" and Willie Horton.

Mead mires his arguments in contradictions. For Mead, the emergence of an underclass represents the replacement of a hard-working generation by one that doesn't want to work. At the same time, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asserts, "Black demoralization is heavily due to the oppressions of slavery and Jim Crow." Where, then, did the hard-working generation come from? Either the history of blacks is one of demoralization and passivity since slavery days or nonwork and associated behaviors have emerged only recently.

In Mead's explanation of "nonwork," psychology buttresses culture. Mead tries to strike a "moderate" stance, rejecting "the position that nonwork is sensible behavior for the poor, and also the view that the poor are fundamentally flawed or opposed to work. I see them rather as dutiful but defeated." Rational explanations don't account for "nonwork," because the poor won't accept the jobs that would improve their situation. Mead equates rationality with the desire to make money. For him, the search for material gain is the only rational behavior. This is why economists' rational models can't explain "nonwork" in America's ghettos, where residents live outside the market. For some mysterious reason, ghetto residents do not believe opportunity exists for them. One might read the evidence another way. Pessimism about future prospects rests on a realistic assessment of the job market.

To dismiss the role of psychology in "nonwork" would be foolish, although I suspect it operates differently than Mead contends and that the issue is not irrationality or cultural memory but the duration of joblessness. Little else can be as demoralizing as the inability to find a decent job. Work, moreover, requires habits learned and practiced over time. Rusty, maybe never learned, they become progressively harder to activate, and potential employers regard the long-term unemployed with heightened suspicion. The longer one goes without a job, the harder it is to get and hold one.

For Mead, "incompetence" distinguishes the dependent poor from other Americans and necessitates a different kind of social policy. Mead finds the problem of dependency politics also gnawing away like a cancer in international affairs. On the world scene, his hero is the IMF, "which operates as a kind of international workfare." The principal issue for the politics of dependency "hinges on whether the needy can be responsible for themselves, and above all, on whether they have the competence to manage their lives." By "competence" Mead means "all the qualities that allow a person to get ahead in economic terms—not only intelligence, but foresight, energy, discipline, and the ability to sacrifice for the future." Mead, a conservative, builds his case by asserting the passivity and incompetence of the poor; yet he also contends that only conservatives believe in the competence of the poor and their ability to work regularly like everybody else. He can't have it both ways.

Competence is the quality essential for "normal functioning"; it also creates entitlement to citizenship. "The question," Mead asks, "is how passive you can be and remain a citizen in full standing." Part of "competence" is employment, which, he contends, "is essential to being a functional citizen." Mead's connection between "nonwork" and "competence" redraws the boundaries of political community to exclude large numbers of Americans from the ordinary entitlements of citizenship. Indeed, Mead is no friend of diversity. He attacks bilingual education and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, "as amended and interpreted by the courts, instituted a kind of electoral affirmative action." He would prefer that immigrants and minorities not be allowed to vote unless they are both fully employed and fluent in English.

Mead contrasts the new politics of dependency with an older progressive politics that lasted until the 1960s. The old issues, he writes, were "economic and structural; the new ones are social and personal." The left wanted to "expand" government's intervention in the marketplace on behalf of workers; the right wanted to restrict it. Progressive politics debated the tradeoffs between security, equality, and growth. It defended the boundary between the individual and the state. Dependency politics asks, "how fully Americans should live up to values, including basic civilities, on which nearly everyone is agreed. . . . Good behavior is at issue, not the good society." Contrary to Mead's version of political history, since early in the nation's history authoritarian efforts to regulate behavior have remained central to conservatism, which has confined its concern with freedom primarily to the marketplace.

Also contrary to Mead's claims, American writing about poverty always has stressed the personal responsibility of the poor for their plight; federal planners of the 1960s did not try to defeat poverty through income transfers; the 1970s hardly constituted the first time critics seriously asserted the incapacity of government to reach its goals; there is little, if any, evidence that the "public loves to help poor people" through employment; and community action's history and accomplishments do not fit Mead's distorted account of its failures or the forces that killed it.

As a conservative advocate of big government, Mead rejects the views of other conservatives, notably Charles Murray, who believe that simply eliminating welfare will reduce dependence. For Mead, government has permitted an excess of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

freedom, and we have reaped the consequences in nonwork, dependence, illegitimacy, crime, drugs, and social disorder. What Mead wants from government, in a word, is authority.

In practical terms, Mead advocates compulsory workfare. Voluntarism, he believes, not only will not work; it reflects "a lesser view of competence than programs that make serious demands on the dependent." The jobless poor, especially young men and single mothers, do not respond to ordinary incentives. "Incentives assume competence; the need is to create it." To reach them, social policy needs to rely on the stick rather than the carrot. In *Beyond Entitlement,* Mead justified compulsion on moral grounds. The poor had an obligation to work for their support; neither wages, working conditions, nor prospects were relevant. In his current book, Mead has traded his moral defense of compulsion for a psychological one. Without compulsion, the dependent poor will not realize the importance of work. In fact, with virtually no evidence, he observes that welfare clients like compulsion; only liberal activists object. This is not the view I hear from lawyers and welfare-rights advocates. But Mead would dismiss them as partisan, claiming greater objectivity for himself and his conservative allies.

Mead supports his policy recommendations with a caricature of liberal programs and a celebration of contemporary workfare, especially the WIN program as it has been implemented in San Diego. When such programs don't work, in his view, it is the fault of clients who fail to follow good advice or to seize opportunities. Mead relies on Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) data, the principal evaluation of WIN experiments, which he interprets selectively. A more careful analysis of the same data shows these experiments to have been largely failures, which did not lift clients above the poverty line or put many into permanent jobs. Their "success" consists almost solely in saving money for the state by sanctioning clients and "churning" the welfare rolls. Clients looked through telephone directories and other job listings, but they received very little job preparation or support, and, most seriously, these programs paid no attention to job creation. Welfare and labor-market policies remained, as always in American politics, dissociated.

Mead's specific recommendations are surprisingly timid and conventional. Aside from compulsory workfare, he would allow fathers of AFDC families to work, and he would supplement low wages with public funds. He calls for better education and drug enforcement. Although he wants to encourage the dependent poor to seize opportunity, he does not think government should do very much to set them on the road to real upward mobility, and he opposes allowing clients to leave their workfare jobs to pursue education. In the end, if his strategy succeeded, it would increase the supply of reliable, low-wage workers.

Mead has highlighted a new form of poverty concentrated especially in America's inner cities. He is right that conditions within them are unprecedented in American history. He has identified an important new strand in national politics. He has argued correctly that policy has a moral as well as an economic dimension. Nonetheless, he misleads about the evidence, misreads history, substitutes rhetorical tricks for reasoned analysis, slips into a language that reinforces class and racial stigma, mires himself in contradictions, seeks to exclude many Americans from citizenship, and proposes curtailing freedom and extending authority. He offers an intellectual foundation for conservatism in the nineties and beyond. I fear it will be as influential as it is flawed. □

Lewis Coser

LEFT PATERNALISM

RED VIENNA: EXPERIMENT IN WORKING CLASS CULTURE, by Helmut Gruber. Oxford University Press, 1991. 270 pp. $29.95.

Most historical work on Austrian socialism in the interwar years is inclined to praise it, often somewhat over-enthusiastically. Helmut Gruber's intention in this book, however, is to bury it. There was no doubt a strong tendency among socialist commentators in Europe and in this country to concoct a kind of rose-colored mythology about the legendary Red Vienna that Gruber delights in debunking, but his demythologizing effort carries him farther than he might have intended. As a result, this book by an author who clearly sympathizes with the New Left in this country sometimes reads almost like a right-wing polemic.

The prevalent left-wing myth about socialist Vienna in the twenties has it that Vienna prefigured in crucial respects the socialist commonwealth of the future. The Austrian socialist movement, so it was argued, had managed to reintegrate into political society a previously rootless and alienated working class by creating socialist institutions, by no means

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all of them of a political character, that succeeded in constructing an autonomous framework and support for a community of Vienna's workers. What had once been an antheap of deprived and isolated individuals had become a true *Gemeinschaft*. It was transformed through networks of participatory institutions in which Vienna's working class found cultural as well as material support in the company of equals.

That such an institutional framework was indeed created can hardly be denied, and Gruber does not deny it. But what he tries to show is that these institutions were in the main paternalistic structures led by Socialist party functionaries who pretended to know what was good for the people and argued that their socialist knowledge provided legitimation and justification for the transformation of inchoate masses into proud beneficiaries of a municipal welfare society.

A young socialist worker in, say, the mid-twenties, was indeed likely to grow up in a counterculture and counter-society that took care of him from cradle to grave. He was likely to be born in a municipal hospital controlled by the socialist city administration. He went to public schools, a high proportion of whose teachers were members of the Socialist party. As he began to look for a job he was aided by municipal or union job placement offices. Once in a job, he joined the craft or industrial union of his trade. When he got married, the ceremony was typically not celebrated by a Catholic priest but by a socialist municipal councillor. His youngsters joined the socialist Red Falcons at the requisite age, and later the Socialist Youth movement. He had in the meantime become a member of the Socialist party. He never missed the party pay day in the back room of a beer hall in his neighborhood where local members went once every month to pay their party dues and to participate in the party gossip of their quarter or of the city as a whole. No so-called class-conscious worker was supposed to belong to what was considered a bourgeois sports club; he joined the parallel socialist sports organizations that existed in almost all branches of work. When he wished to attend a play or a concert, he went to the "Volkstheater" (the People's Theater) and to a concert hall controlled by the Red cultural managers even though its concert program and theatrical offerings differed only marginally from the bourgeois variety. When he was ill he went again to the same municipal hospital in which he was born. And finally, when his time came, he was buried by a socialist burial society on the municipal cemetery amid his socialist comrades.

Gruber reports all the facts of the case in a faithful but sometimes too brief manner. What he disputes in the bulk of his thesis is the meaning conventionally attributed to these facts. While not entirely neglecting positive aspects, the book is above all an experiment in trenchant criticism. The following paragraph sums up the essence of his critical stance:

> By casting workers as both less than human (because their lives knew only misery) and at the same time malleable, the directors of Vienna's cultural experiment could disregard the existence of worker subcultures and presume a kind of cultural tabula rasa on which they could imprint all that a new proletarian culture would require. The cultural reform based on the perspective that the workers lived like primitives lacking in standards and norms of common decency could become, in a sense, acts of creation in which the worker as a human emerged from the raw clay of the exploited and brutish beings.

Strong stuff this, but, alas, containing several ounces of truth. By and large, even though there were major exceptions, the leaders of the socialist movement were reform-minded members of the academic or professional middle class whose links to the working class on an everyday level were tenuous indeed. In the higher reaches of the party leadership, Jewish professionals tended to predominate. The leader of the party, Otto Bauer, was, of course, Jewish himself. All in all, and despite the fact that the party also allowed the emergence in leadership positions of working-class intellectuals, such as Joseph Buttinger, who was for many years a devoted contributor to and editor of *Dissent* in this country, there was a great deal of cultural distance between the bulk of the leadership and the rank and file. By and large Gruber is correct in saying that "the SDAP operated as a paternalistic machine." He provides telling examples.

The proudest achievement of the socialist housing officials in the Viennese municipal administration was the new housing complexes that so impressed foreign visitors and admirers. It is indeed astonishing that in the mid-twenties 25,000 new apartments were built in mainly working-class quarters despite tight commercial conditions and the financial troubles of the municipality. But Gruber discovered a fly in the ointment. The municipal planners showed no interest in renovating older but still serviceable housing, putting all their energy into impressive new projects that could advertise the new Vienna even though many more persons could have been served if more attention had been paid to renovation. Such priorities, it should be stressed, were determined by the socialist leadership of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vienna without participation and consultation of prospective tenants.

A building constructed for senior party and municipal employees consisted of four rooms, kitchen, bathroom, toilet and maid's room. It seems to have been the case that younger working-class couples with one or two children made up the bulk of the new tenants, but rumors abounded that correct political connections helped. (This became much more pronounced in post-World War II Vienna. I remember asking a worker why he had joined the Socialist party after the War. He answered without blinking an eye: "Because I need better housing.") But quite apart from such perhaps relatively infrequent cases, it is certainly true, to repeat, that the party elders felt justified acting *in loco parentis* when it came to their charges. I know of no instance in which municipal planners or architects consulted future inhabitants about their wishes.

Gruber sums up his indictment by writing: "For many [party functionaries] keeping their particular organization or activity going became an end in itself . . . . They were victims of their own claims of success." This is a strong indictment, and it is, of course, substantiated by numerous other studies illustrating the Iron Law of Oligarchy, which Robert Michels had already formulated before World War I. Yet, there are circumstances in which party officers could have pleaded attenuating circumstances that Gruber tends to ignore.

Postwar Vienna was, of course, the monstrous hydrocephalic head of a miserable small country, which only a short while earlier had been the head of an immense empire. Even in the mid-twenties, when the scarcity and hunger of the immediate postwar years had been overcome, Vienna was a very sick city indeed. It is against this background, and not against conditions in more stable countries, that the success or failure of the experiment of Red Vienna must be measured. Thus it seems to me unfair to compare the quality of housing in Vienna in the twenties with conditions in, for example, Hamburg or other German cities. Germany in the mid-twenties was a relatively strong and viable political and economic entity, not a sickly backwater. Gruber sticks too much to the text of the story he wishes to tell, and pays altogether insufficient attention to the context. In a parallel manner, he tends to judge events of the Austrian twenties in terms of the standards of the American sixties.

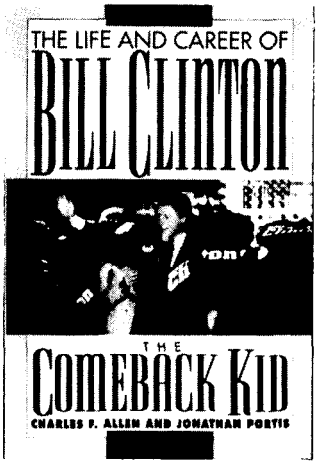
All in all, this book deserves attention as a valuable effort at demystification, but a definitive study of Red Vienna, warts and all, is still very much needed. □

The First In-Depth Biography of the Democratic Candidate for President

The Comeback Kid
The Life and Career of Bill Clinton
By Charles F. Allen and Jonathan Portis

"The most informative text available on the man who would be president." —Kirkus Reviews

Thorough, penetrating and balanced, **The Comeback Kid** is based on extensive research and interviews with political figures, childhood friends, opponents—and even Bill and Hillary Clinton themselves.



Hardcover, 312 pages, 16 pages of photographs
Published by Birch Lane Press/Carol Publishing Group

To order, call 1-800-447-BOOK (MasterCard or Visa)
or send $18.95, plus $3.00 shipping and handling, to
Carol Publishing Group, 120 Enterprise Ave., Dept. DS, Secaucus, NJ 07094

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Memoriam

JOSEPH BUTTINGER
1906–1992

Joseph Buttinger was one of the last of a now almost extinct species, a self-educated worker-intellectual. He was born in a provincial Austrian town into a working-class family. His father was a highway builder and his mother a servant. He was almost entirely self-taught, since his family could not afford the expenses necessary for higher education. Having joined the Austrian Social-Democratic party as an adolescent and having later become an active provincial leader, Buttinger acquired his culture and knowledge largely within the ranks of his party. He read his first book at age fifteen. Yet he then moved from glass worker to political educator and leader in very little time.

When the authoritarian regime of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss declared the Social-Democratic party illegal in 1934, and after a short and futile attempt at toppling the government in a four-day insurrection by Vienna's socialists was defeated, the party's leadership, largely located in the capital, had to flee abroad. It was then that Buttinger, a largely unknown, and young, political leader from the provinces, became the head of the underground socialist movement, a role he played until the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938.

During his illegal work for the party, Buttinger often found refuge with a young American medical student named Muriel Gardiner. They fell in love and were married shortly after Buttinger managed to escape from Nazi Austria. Only after their relationship had already been firmly established did Gardiner "confess" to Buttinger that she was a very wealthy heiress from one of the major American meat-packing families, and that the Buttingers now had a very large fortune. After their return from Europe, the couple fashioned a new life for themselves. Muriel became a renowned psychoanalyst specializing in the treatment of disturbed children, while Joseph became an omnivorous reader of works in sociology, economics, and history in his private library of many thousand volumes in a town house on New York's Upper East Side. In those years the Buttingers spent large sums of money to help their fellow refugees find their bearings in America. Whenever a refugee couple encountered obstacles and difficulties, there was always the implicit or explicit advice: Go and see Joe. . . .

When American policy makers became seriously interested in the fate of a hitherto hardly noticed French colony, Indochina, Buttinger, perhaps moved by the fate of his own Austria, began to immerse himself in the literature of Southeast Asia. In an amazingly short time he became a well-known and respected author of several important books on Vietnam.

When Irving Howe, my wife, Rose, and I began talking about publishing a socialist political quarterly at the high point of Joe McCarthy's assault on American decency, values and fundamental liberties, the old advice was followed: Go and see Joe. And he proved to be the guardian angel once again. He assured us that he would give *Dissent* a fixed sum of money each year. It was not very much compared to the large-scale funds backing journals such as the *Nation* or the *New Republic,* but it meant much to us over the very many years of Joe's association with the magazine. Joe contributed a number of important articles on Vietnam to *Dissent,* and he joined the board of editors. At no time did Joe attempt to influence the policy of *Dissent.*

Joseph Buttinger was an exemplary figure, a true friend. He represented all the virtues of the prewar socialist movement from which he came. He was a true comrade.

LEWIS A. COSER □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Openness and the Teamsters

Editors:

I write as the officer appointed by the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York to supervise the recently concluded 1991 Teamster International Union Officer election. In his recent article, "Teamsters Choose Democracy," carried in the Spring 1992 issue of *Dissent*, Herman Benson—a founder of the Association for Union Democracy (AUD)—asserts that but for his organization's involvement the election "would have been a mockery; the old guard would have been 'elected' easily after massive fraud." This is not the first time that Mr. Benson has taken credit for the universally acclaimed fairness of the Teamster election process which I supervised. While I have refrained from commenting during the two-year election period, it is appropriate—now that the election is concluded—that the record be set straight.

Mr. Benson's assertion is grounded upon the proposed rules for the supervision of the Teamster election process and his contention that they "would have surrendered control [of the election] to incumbent local Teamster officials. . . ." Mr. Benson is either being purposefully disingenuous or has failed to read my proposal and the remarks I made—both orally and in writing—simultaneously with the submission of the rules to the district court. Both the proposed rules and my written comments regarding them stated unequivocally that I intended to exercise "my right and responsibility under the Consent Order to supervise *on location* every phase of the election process" (emphasis added). Indeed, the presentation to the court of the proposed rules was accompanied by my request to hire twenty-five Regional Coordinators to supervise the election of International Union Convention delegates and alternate delegates; that application further noted my intention to hire additional field staff for these same purposes. I can assure Mr. Benson that this staff would not have been "sitting in Washington," awaiting tally sheets from the various local unions. They would have been most actively involved in every phase of the election process, closely supervising the entirety of that process "on location," as I stated.

That "even TDU found his rules essentially acceptable" speaks loudly to the proposition that Mr. Benson's comments reflect a distorted viewpoint. Surely, TDU, "the most remarkable rank-and-file reform movement ever recorded in American labor history," would not have found acceptable rules that would have made any election a "mockery."

Mr. Benson's inaccurate reportage is further underscored by his comments regarding the ability of Ron Carey to directly reach the membership through the pages of the *International Teamster*. Contrary to Mr. Benson's statement, the Consent Order did not give Mr. Carey that opportunity. What provided that access to Mr. Carey and other serious candidates—which contact I also believe was essential to ensure an open and honest election—were the very same rules I proposed and he so roundly condemns.

Mr. Benson and the AUD spent considerable time during the election process accusing myself and the independent administrator, Frederick B. Lacey, of having "collapsed and abandoned their responsibilities as defenders of Teamster democracy." For instance, AUD protested vociferously my decision, approved both by Judge Lacey and the very same court he now praises, not to prohibit unelected delegates, e.g., regional representatives, to attend the international union convention, albeit with no right to participate in the election process that occurred there.

AUD predicted that these unelected delegates would "come as an organized praetorian guard . . . armed with the power to intimidate. . . . They will . . . threaten reprisals to those who oppose them." If those threats took place at that convention, no one—including AUD—has brought them to my, Judge Lacey's, or the court's attention. Numerous impartial observers, including members of the national press, reported that the Teamster Convention was open, contentious, and, most important, democratic.

Mr. Benson has either misread, misunderstood, or ignored all that which does not lend support to his heartfelt belief that without AUD no fair, open, honest election would have occurred in the Teamsters. In fact, the AUD was a tolerable, though unnecessary, adjunct to the democratic process implemented by me, the other court-appointed officers, and the United States District Court.

MICHAEL H. HOLLAND
Washington, D.C.

The Teamster Elections—II

Editors:

Herman Benson's article on the Teamsters' Union election (*Dissent*, Spring 1992) was very informative to readers who had relied completely on the business press. However, I believe that Benson went afield in making my good friend and dedicated trade union supporter Michael Holland into a dupe of the "old guard." Michael Holland has had a record in the labor movement that was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exemplary. As a labor lawyer he has been in the forefront of many progressive battles in Illinois and elsewhere. His work as the attorney for the Illinois Coal Miners' Union was more than up to standard. And he was campaign manager of Richard Trumka's successful campaign for the presidency of the United Mine Workers Union. We all know what that has meant to the labor movement.

I know that Michael Holland was extremely reluctant to take on the election assignment. His associate in the election was Barbara Hillman, with whom I worked in the days when I was loaned to AFSCME by Walter Reuther. I was then the acting director of the Illinois State Council and Hillman's firm was our lawyer.

The number of friends who worked in the electoral process was an indication of Holland's commitment to democratic unionism.

In September I will celebrate my fiftieth anniversary in the UAW. For more than twenty-five years I've practically been the Chicago agent of *Dissent*. I haven't written a letter to the editor in all these years. I had to in this case because Michael Holland deserves better than an article that made it appear as if he were a stooge of the old guard in the Teamsters' Union.

CARL SHIER
Chicago, Ill.

Herman Benson Replies:

Carl Shier's character testimony for Michael Holland does not address the issues in the Teamster elections. Since I have great respect for Carl's judgment, I surely accept his view that Holland deserves his fine reputation as a dedicated union supporter. My piece did not suggest that Holland was a "stooge" for the old guard but that he and other government officers were almost "outmaneuvered" by the old guard. I would add that once the judge imposed effective oversight rules upon Holland, he did an excellent job of supervising the election and guaranteeing an honest count.

None of this changes in the slightest the reality that if the rules proposed by Holland had prevailed, the election would have been a farce, votes would have been stolen, and the old guard would probably still be in power at the top of the Teamsters union. That's because Holland proposed to permit the incumbent locals' officials, the old guard base, to run the election, distribute and count the ballots, and even, at one stage, to print them.

There's nothing new here in what Mr. Holland writes about the rules. He made essentially these arguments two years ago, but they were rejected by Judge Edelstein in his order of July 10, 1990. If, in retrospect, Mr. Holland now likes to think that AUD's intervention was "tolerable though unnecessary" it must be because he is the victim of a merciful lapse of memory, forgetting that AUD alerted the judge to the fraud dangers in Holland's proposals, that the judge mandated critical changes, and that all the court-appointed officers later admitted in open court that the judge was right.

At court hearings on October 4, 1991, Judge Edelstein said, "I went beyond the recommendation of my own court-appointed officers." Mr. Holland may recall the recorded reply of independent administrator Frederick Lacey that "there was a caucus of the court-appointed officers and the government after your Honor amended our submissions and we agreed you were right and I am glad you did what you did."

Holland's quote from his own earlier comments didn't convince the judge. It is a misleading fragment; the full text makes its real meaning clear, but even a slightly larger fragment is illuminating enough:

> Where cooperation is forthcoming from Local Unions, I do not intend to "take the gavel" and conduct the delegate nominations and elections. At the same time . . . I have no intention to waive my right and responsibility under the Consent Order to supervise on location every phase of the election process.

The full text makes it even clearer that he was threatening to use his rights *only where local officials refused to "cooperate."* And, to "cooperate," they needed only send him an acceptable plan outlining how they, the officials, would run their own elections. Promises, promises, but there were no provisions for verifying whether these paper promises would be fulfilled. In actuality, then, his rules meant turning control over to the local combines. Here is just one example among many:

On "Counting the Ballots," his proposed rules provided: "All ballots shall be counted where they are cast," with no requirements or even references to supervision by any representative of the election officer, none whatsoever.

Here is what the judge insisted upon instead: "All ballots shall be counted by the Election Officer or his representative." A decisive change, no? The judge ordered that some twenty sections in Holland's proposed rules be similarly changed to provide for supervision by election officers instead of by union officials. In explaining his order, the judge wrote:

> The final election rules [i.e., Holland's] leave many critical election functions to the officers of local unions. This situation is unacceptable, since these same officers who will be conducting the elections for the international convention will have great personal stakes in the election's outcome. In order for these elections to accomplish their mission, the rank and file must have confidence in the election process.
>
> Complete supervision of all facets of the election process is the only way to guarantee the integrity of the elections and encourage extensive rank and file participation. To that end, the Election Officer must oversee each and every facet of this election in order to prevent any possibility of fraud, coercion, intimidation, harassment, or threat in any of its varied forms. While the Election Officer has commented that he will consider "the history of prior proceedings alleging improper election conduct" in determining the proper amount of supervision, this subjective determination is insufficient. Locals where members are intimidated or reluctant to lodge protests may be inadequately safeguarded.

It was AUD that called these dangers to the judge's attention and proposed to address them; and, yes, to that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

extent AUD does indeed deserve an important measure of credit for assuring a fair Teamster election. (Mr. Holland will remember, too, that AUD represented rank-and-file Teamsters in dozens of cases that came before him where he sat essentially as a neutral while AUD was their advocate. In many of these cases, we felt it necessary to appeal from his decisions to the independent administrator.)

Mr. Holland's reference to what AUD characterized as the "bogus" unelected old guard staff appointees who were permitted certain delegate rights on the convention floor is unrelated to my *Dissent* piece. Space available here does not permit me to comment on that or on other important aspects of the election rules. For copies of our full presentations at the time, write me at AUD, 500 State Street, Brooklyn 11217. □

Multiculturalism Debate Short on Facts

Editors:

A concern to address the dismal rate of success for minority students, a concern for the nation's economic future, changing immigration patterns, the significant growth of minority student population in schools that are underfunded and failing—all have led to a renewed interest in multicultural education and bilingualism.

Unfortunately, the essay by Kay S. Hymowitz, "Self Esteem & Multiculturalism in the Public Schools" (*Dissent*, Winter 1992), instead of analyzing these efforts, was long on stereotypes and oversimplifications and short on information or remedies for the crisis of urban, multiracial education.

I have worked in multicultural classes with minority teachers for over twenty years. I spend about a day per week working in schools serving Latinos, Asians, African Americans, and whites, most of them the working poor. The other four days a week I spend in a working-class university trying to help students, a majority Chicano, to become successful teachers. The descriptions offered by Hymowitz and in similar articles elsewhere do not match any reality I have seen.

Writers select examples they have read in other tracts and cite them as evidence of a trend. The two examples in the Hymowitz article, cited from Sacramento, are, in fact, ridiculous. Some thirty students, out of over five thousand, studied Mayan mathematics. (Actually, I once studied it in Mexico and found it interesting.) This becomes a news item, when, of course, 4,970 students did not study Mayan math. The same applies for the thirty young African Americans who studied a "mind models" technique.

The list of school districts with programs in multicultural education offered in the article is misleading unless there is some measure of how many students in the district receive some assistance. As with the "scandal" of all-black commencements last spring and the furor over all-male, black schools, the number of such programs, in comparison to the number of students in devastated, underfunded, failing schools, makes the "problem" identified by white liberals absurd in comparison to the problems experienced by this generation of urban students. In most of the cases cited in the article, there is a program in one or two schools, with one or two teachers.

The task of the teacher is to respect the culture the child brings from home and to build upon the culture and language the child already has. In school the child learns the skills, attitudes, and knowledge base of the dominant culture. All students need to know how this society works. Indeed, it is multicultural education that is most radically bringing up the issue of the democratic role of education, while the neoconservative "reformers" are engaged in tying schools closely to markets, incentives, and testing.

For students of minority-status cultures (in many cities and four states these students are the majority) study of their own culture, as it is, dynamic and evolving, can empower the student to make important life choices, such as the choice to complete high school or college.

Many children from Latino, African American, and other minority cultures experience devaluation of their humanness by their stereotypic presentations in texts or, at times, their omission. The struggle to change the texts is important. And the battle for multicultural education or antiracism education is not a black-white issue. Those who work in real schools know that there are many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups in the classroom. Criticism of the historical validity of the Portland Baseline Essays on Africa does not refute the need for school and textbook reform.

The antidiversity campaign, like the anti-affirmative action campaign, represents a conservative backlash. Writers from Allen Bloom to Dinesh D'Souza seek to ferret out small islands of attempts at democratic reform in a decaying public education system.

Are there errors and abuses in multicultural education? Of course. Have unproven claims been made about self-esteem? Yes. Are the descriptions contained in articles such as that of Kay Hymowitz a reasonable facsimile of reality? No, not at all.

The democratic left needs to understand and participate in the struggle to reconstruct the common school as an instrument of political and economic democracy. The attacks on multicultural education miss the point. I encourage my students to read Jonathan Kozol's recent book, *Savage Inequalities*. It provides a more accurate description of school realities.

If every U.S. curriculum endorsed pluralism tomorrow, at least one third of our schools would still be disaster zones. The savage inequalities of funding, teacher preparation, time, buildings, and equipment devastate urban and rural poverty areas. An inclusive curriculum is one small step toward educational democracy. Students also need to learn to read, to write, to perform mathematics. Most teachers know that success in school builds self-esteem more than Mayan mathematics. Multicultural education has a small positive impact on improving skills. But schools should build democracy as well as teach skills, and multicultural education, as it really exists, is central to that struggle.

Now that the forces of reaction have held the center of federal power and of many state powers for over a decade, they seek to guarantee that their particular view of history and culture is taught as truth in the schools. The California

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

state Framework praised by Hymowitz, for example, was co-authored by neoconservative favorite Diane Ravitch, now appointed by President Bush as an Undersecretary of Education for Research and School Reform. It was criticized by most of the progressive and minority organizations in the state.

Having defeated the democratic left in politics, the right has moved to concentrate its attack on universities and public school curricula as vestigial remaining centers of another point of view. Favorite topics have been bilingual education, the absurd PC debate in which the right created a demon in order to get published and slay the demon, and now multiculturalism. The strategy is to distort reality, demonize ideas and progressive people of color, to keep power in the hands of the present masters. For a more complete discussion of this issue I urge readers to see "Willie Horton's Gonna Get Your Alma Mater," by Elizabeth Martinez in the July/August 1991 issue of Z, or to come to meetings of the Anti-Racism, Latino, and African American Commissions of DSA,where progressives experienced in the school wars discuss these issues.

DUANE E. CAMPBELL
Sacramento, Calif.

Kay Hymowitz Replies:

One of the major purposes of my article was to underscore the sentimentalization of culture that is endemic to multicultural tracts; Duane Campbell's letter is no exception. Culture, which is not the same as race or ethnicity, cannot be reduced to easily taught categories like "values," "customs," or "beliefs." It is far deeper, or "thicker," as anthropologists put it, reflected in everything from a person's smallest automatic gestures to his or her largest unconscious assumptions about the self. There is no way for even the most well-meaning teacher to disentangle from his or her own culture; thus, the multiculturalists themselves are creatures of cultural assumptions that are often at odds with those of the students they claim to be empowering.

Campbell never addresses this argument; in fact, in saying that "the task of the teacher is . . . to build upon the culture . . . the child already has" he dramatizes my point. Assuming a teacher is from a different cultural background, he or she cannot possibly do this without trivializing, not to mention patronizing, the child's identity as much as any ethnocentric teacher. Furthermore, what happens when the child's cultural values are in conflict with the goals of democratic education that Campbell so forcefully articulates? To take one of my more obvious examples, what if the child comes from a culture that does not accept education as a route to a better life? How does a teacher "build upon" this?

My purpose in using "ridiculous" examples was not to "cite . . . evidence of a trend"; it was rather to demonstrate in its starkest form the danger of the sentimentality of multiculturalism in the schools. I wasn't aware that any of this could be labeled conservative; nor do I see why you have to accept multiculturalism in order to decry the savage inequalities of our nation's school system. On the contrary, it is because I believe that multiculturalism will unwittingly perpetuate those inequalities that I wrote the article. □

Philosophy&SocialCriticism

an international quarterly journal

Focusing on:
- Continental Thought
- American Philosophy
- Politics
- Ethics
- Law
- Hermeneutics
- Literaty Theory
- Cultural Critique
- Modernity and Postmodernity

PHILOSOPHY & SOCIAL CRITICISM
PHIL SOP SOCI CRIT SM

Current Subscription Rates: Volume 18 (1992)

Library	$80 US & Canada / $88 Foreign
Individual	$30 US & Canada / $33 Foreign
Full-time Student	$25 US & Canada / $28 Foreign

Name:
Address:
City State or Province Zip Code Country

SEND CHECK PAYABLE TO: PHILOSOPHY & SOCIAL CRITICISM
David M. Rasmussen, Editor; Dept. of Philosophy; Boston College; Chestnut Hill, MA 02167; USA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Death Without Weeping

The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil
NANCY SCHEPER-HUGHES

"[An] important, shocking study....The compelling narrative investigates the everyday tactics of survival that people use to stay alive."—*Publishers Weekly*
"Simply breathtaking...as exciting to read as a good novel."—*Library Journal*

A Centennial Book
$29.00 cloth, illustrated

Strategic Bankruptcy

How Corporations and Creditors Use Chapter 11 to Their Advantage
KEVIN J. DELANEY

"Delaney has set himself a task fit for a hero. . . . He offers a perspective on corporate restructuring that is bound to change our thinking for years to come."
—John D. Ayer, University of California, Davis & former U.S. Bankruptcy Judge
$23.00 cloth

America at Century's End

Edited by ALAN WOLFE
New in paperback—
"A massive, lively, often surprising portrait of America in the throes of change."—*Publishers Weekly*
"Clear, winning, and original. . . . Offers the best of contemporary sociological methods, along with with a convincing analysis of the usual sociological topics, each with a special twist."—*Kirkus Reviews*
$15.00 paper

To the Right

The Transformation of American Conservatism
JEROME L. HIMMELSTEIN
New in paperback—
"[Himmelstein's] analysis of the realignment thesis and of why conservatives could not unite beyond the Reagan years is compelling."
—*American Political Science Review*
$14.00 paper

Protectors of Privilege

Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America
FRANK DONNER
New in paperback—
"[An] excellently researched, thoughtful and well-detailed study of police spying."
—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*
$16.00 paper

Steeltown, USSR

Soviet Society in the Gorbachev Era
STEPHEN KOTKIN
New in paperback with a new epilogue—"[Kotkin] reports with controlled passion and vividness the social and economic tribulations of a proletarian population."
—*New York Review of Books*

A Centennial Book
$13.00 paper, illlustrated

Political Criticism

IAN SHAPIRO
New in paperback—"A provocative and compelling vision of political theory."
—*Dissent*
"Refreshing and thought-provoking."
—*Perspectives on Political Science*
$15.00 paper

At bookstores or order 1-800-822-6657.

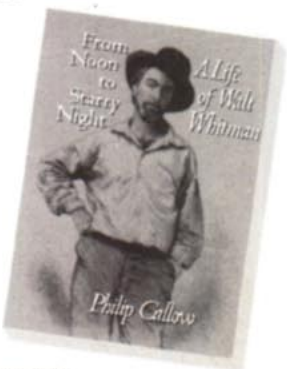
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New and important.

"His prose is clear and easy and elegant, his observations sharp but kind and never superficial."—V. S. Naipaul

"Callow is a writer who feels life, smells it, eats and drinks it, draws it up through the soles of his feet."—John Wain



FROM NOON TO STARRY NIGHT

A Life of Walt Whitman

by Philip Callow

Published on the hundredth anniversary of Whitman's death, Callow's evocative biography captures the elusive truth of the great poet of democracy. Here is a beguiling, surprising life in all its roundness and intricate corners—a wonderfully detailed portrait, lyrically told. *Eight pages of photographs.*

"She remains an inexhaustibly fascinating person."—*The Times* (London)

BEATRICE WEBB

A Life

by Carole Seymour-Jones

Was she the triumph of the independent Englishwoman, or merely a heroic failure? Here is the brilliant and beautiful Beatrice in a very modern story of choices—of socialism over love, and social commitment over social privilege. An intriguing biography with important reverberations for our own time. *Eight pages of photographs.*

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher

1332 North Halsted Street, Chicago 60622

At your bookseller, or order toll free 1-800-634-0226.
Major credit cards accepted.

dissent

521 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10017

14423 10/31/92
ROCHELLE FLANDERS
711 AMSTERDAM AVENUE
NEW YORK NY
10025

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED